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briarpatch

FIERCELY INDEPENDENT

THE STRUGGLE FOR
FOOD SECURITY
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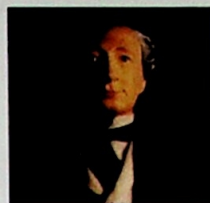
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Canada



Beyond Holding Your Nose

Earlier this year, the federal NDP sent out a press release to media outlets including *Briarpatch* with the subject line, "Tom Mulcair's NDP will strengthen the mining industry." The release quotes Mulcair, who says, "Unlike the Conservatives who have put mining on the back burner, the NDP understands that this industry drives prosperity in Canada." For anyone remotely familiar with Canada's infamous mining and extractive industries, and Conservative ties to them, it sounds like satire, but the press release went out on the first of March, not April.

In January, the federal NDP announced a proposed tax cut for small businesses, following on Mulcair's pledge that the party would not raise personal incomes taxes if elected – not for the rich or anyone else.

Perhaps most distressingly for progressives, since 2012 Mulcair has been on record as a supporter of the largest proposed tarsands pipeline in North America. The 4,600 km TransCanada Energy East pipeline would be more than double the length of the better known Keystone XL pipeline project and send as much as 1.1 million barrels a day of diluted bitumen across the continent, from Alberta to New Brunswick. The NDP are officially on board with the scheme. Such is social democratic leadership in the midst of a climate emergency.

I mention the policies above not to target the NDP (who tend to be the best of the lot) but because they illustrate the unconscionably narrow range of political possibility that defines electoral party politics. There is nothing noble, nothing inspiring, nothing empowering, and very little that is meaningfully democratic about participation in parliamentary democracy today (like Alain Badiou, I actually prefer the term "parliamentary capitalism"). And unlike music, dancing, cooking, or anything else that enriches life, the more of yourself that you put into electoral politics the worse it generally feels. (This can be especially true for young women, if the experiences of the people I know are representative.) All this said, it doesn't necessarily follow that there's anything virtuous, empowering, or effective about ignoring the whole affair. A lot of things in life suck, but it's worth doing them anyway. This, I suspect, is how many people feel about voting.

Late last year, *Canadian Dimension*, Canada's venerable independent socialist magazine, published an article called "Working Class Politics After the NDP." In it, Sam Gindin and Michael Hurley declare that "Breaking with the NDP is a core condition for confronting the need to develop a more creative and fruitful politics." The piece, which you can find online, raises many vital questions before it concludes – to the surprise of few – with a call for activists to prepare the way a new socialist party in Canada.

Thankfully for me (and perhaps for you), it's never been the mandate of this publication to outline political programs. *Briarpatch* is defined by its fierce independence, its grassroots

perspectives, and its commitment to social movement building. But ignoring the realities of official and institutional politics doesn't make them go away, and the magnitude of the harm and destruction unleashed by Harper and the Conservatives since 2006 is too great for a progressive publication not to address directly in a federal election year.

So we put together an election roundtable for this issue and, uncharacteristically, we went out of our way to welcome a prominent NDP parliamentarian into the conversation. We thought it was a unique opportunity to have a respected figure from the left wing of the party enter into a dialogue with younger social movement voices. But the moment things got rolling, the parliamentarian backed out, saying that the discussion made her too uncomfortable to participate.

We went ahead with the election roundtable anyway, without any politicians, and maybe that's fitting. What a politician is willing to do is never as important as what we can do together when we organize. And the voices elected officials are willing to hear are never as important as the voices that we are prepared to hear, and the calls that we are prepared to honour, together on the ground. ★

ANDREW LOEWEN, EDITOR
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CORRECTIONS

We regret inaccuracies in the article "Health Care and Immigration Policies that Kill" (March/April 2015) that were the sole responsibility of the editor and not the writer of the article. These errors include: 1) a statement in the second paragraph that cuts to the Interim Federal Health Policy (IFHP) in 2012 denied health-care access to all migrants, when it was those previously covered by the IFHP who were affected. 2) the claim that "Khurshid Begum Awan arrived in Montreal with her husband and daughter in 2011." Awan arrived in 2011 with her grandson, not her daughter. These errors and other inaccuracies have been corrected online and *Briarpatch* apologizes to the writer.




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TALKIN' BACK TO JOHNNY MAC

Bicentennial celebrations for Canada's first prime minister are being met with artistic interventions.

By JANE KIRBY

Photos by EAGLECLAW THOM

It is a brutally cold January morning in Kingston, Ontario, traditional Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee territory, and more than 100 people are huddled together around an enormous statue in a park near the downtown. It's a mixed crowd, with everyone from anarchist punks to elderly ladies in attendance. A few have even donned what appears to be traditional 19th-century garb, complete with petticoats and bonnets. A slow rhythm builds in the distance, and gradually several drummers enter the open space at the foot of the statue. A solemn, cloaked figure follows, wearing a hood over his face and noose around his neck. He faces the statue. There are chuckles as the hooded figure attempts to communicate with the statue by placing a telephone made of string and tin cans up to its ear.

The statue is of Sir John A. Macdonald, best known as Canada's first prime minister and lesser-known for his pivotal role in constructing Canada as a colonial state premised on the

and he plays a major role in the city's popular imagination and tourism, with roads, schools, historic buildings, statues, and pubs honouring his legacy. The Sir John A. industry got a major boost this year, kicking off with "Macdonald Week" in early January.

Recognizing the cultural power of such celebrations, artists like Sutherland and Garneau have decided to unsettle them. Sutherland, who is Métis, has struggled to locate funding for her curatorial project, which will challenge Sir John A.'s legacy through specific performances from five Indigenous and settler artists over the course of the year. The Gertrudes music collective, in collaboration with poet Sadiqa Khan and Métis filmmaker Amanda Strong, created a song and music video to explore what it took to build "one almighty nation." Paul Carl, an Indigenous community member of Algonquin and Oneida ancestry, and Laura Murray, a cultural studies professor at Queen's University, both members of Kingston's Municipal Heritage Committee, have used the opportunity to take aim at public art, and to ask what would happen if Indigenous histories were given as much attention as one genocidal politician.

"I HAD A BIT OF AN EPIPHANY WITH THE BICENTENNIAL, THAT THIS IS HOW HISTORY IS WRITTEN: HERE COMES THE MONEY, THE BIASED SCHOOL CURRICULUM, THE TOURIST PACKAGING."

genocide of Indigenous peoples. The hooded figure, we come to understand, is Louis Riel, the founder of Manitoba and the Métis leader who led his people in two uprisings against the Canadian government. He was executed by Sir John A.'s government in Regina in 1885.

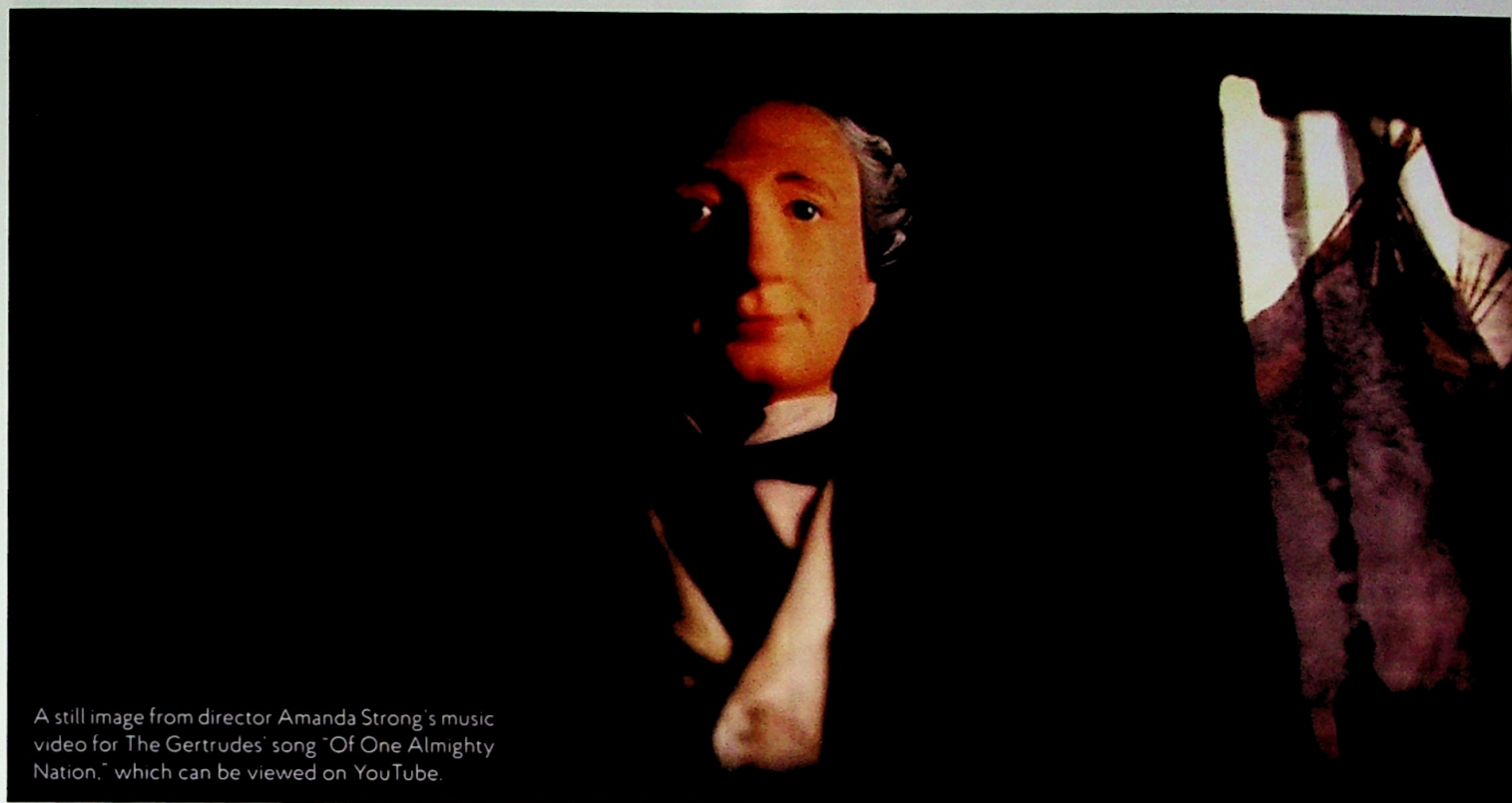
The Kingston performance, *Dear John; Louis David Riel*, was conducted by Métis artist David Garneau as part of curator Erin Sutherland's *Talkin' Back to Johnny Mac* performance series intended to intervene in the official celebration of Sir John A.'s 200th birthday. Sir John A. began his political life in Kingston

WHY ART?

"Art gives people the opportunity to question what they've been taught," says Sutherland. "And it makes politics accessible. I'm not a political person, but art makes politics understandable and interesting to talk about. A lot of the things I have learned about Indigenous politics are from art."

This accessibility is one of the things that makes art such an important political tool.

"There's something special about a song, as opposed to an editorial or a talk. Most people are comfortable with music because of the way it permeates our culture," says Greg Tilson, a singer and guitar player with The Gertrudes. They strategically set their song to a traditional Irish drinking tune to take advantage of this accessibility. "We thought that it would be cool if we wrote a song that people with their beer steins could sing along to, but that actually had this really critical message."



A still image from director Amanda Strong's music video for The Gertrudes' song "Of One Almighty Nation," which can be viewed on YouTube.

The song's video features a Sir John A. doll that was used in the city's commemorative activities set next to arresting images of residential schools.

Art implicates its audience in a way that straightforward information sometimes can't. "I like the provocativeness of art," Garneau says. "It provokes ideas, feelings, and sensations but cannot quite be held to account because we are aware of how much we are implicated in the meaning making."

These artistic interventions raise questions about who we are as people living on this land and the kind of communities we want to create moving forward. "Art is concerned with the symbolic realm, with influence, with reshaping our individual and collective imaginaries," Garneau contends. "This in turn remodels behaviour and policy." Thus, beyond its critical function, art helps us to imagine and even create futures beyond colonialism.

MACDONALD'S LEGACY

*Now you cannot be squeamish if you wish to build a nation
Sir John A. and his colleagues tried the method of starvation
And the Native children that he would soon be ruling
He sent them off to learn his ways in the residential schooling*

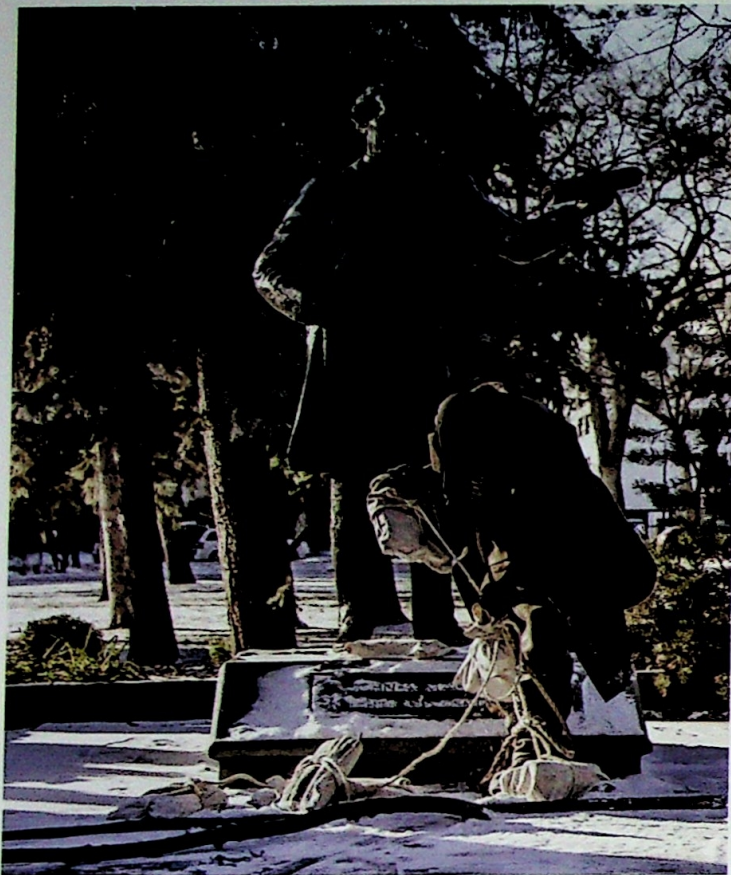
– "Of One Almighty Nation" by The Gertrudes,
with lyrics by Sadiqa Khan

As a key player in the signing of the British North America Act, as Canada's first prime minister, and as the man credited for

the national railway that unified the new nation, Sir John A. is typically glorified as one of Canada's founding heroes.

What is less well-known is that, while prime minister, Sir John A. simultaneously served as minister of Indian Affairs – a double-barrelled portfolio of strategic importance. For there was one major barrier to be taken care of before Sir John A. could achieve his dream of a new country that stretched from sea to sea: the people who already lived here.

In the Prairies, these inconvenient people were handled via the numbered treaties, in which Indigenous peoples exchanged their inherent rights to the land for small parcels of it called reserves. In many cases, people were not eager to sign away their rights to the land and did so only under duress. This was the case with Treaty Six, which was signed in the face of the drastic decline of the bison population. Faced with food shortages, the Plains and Woods Cree, among others, signed the treaty in exchange for a commitment that the Canadian government would provide them with humanitarian food aid. But as historian James Daschuk carefully documents in his celebrated book *Clearing the Plains*, Sir John A. ruthlessly limited the amount of food aid, keeping Indigenous populations on the brink of starvation. "In 1878 there was a full-on famine, and Sir John A. ordered the Mounties to withhold food until people moved to their appointed reserves," Daschuk explains. "So chiefs were forced to exchange their freedom for food." With the near-eradication of the bison, Sir John A. intentionally starved Indigenous people onto reserves, and even there, food rations were so inadequate as to result in decreased immunity and increased susceptibility to disease.



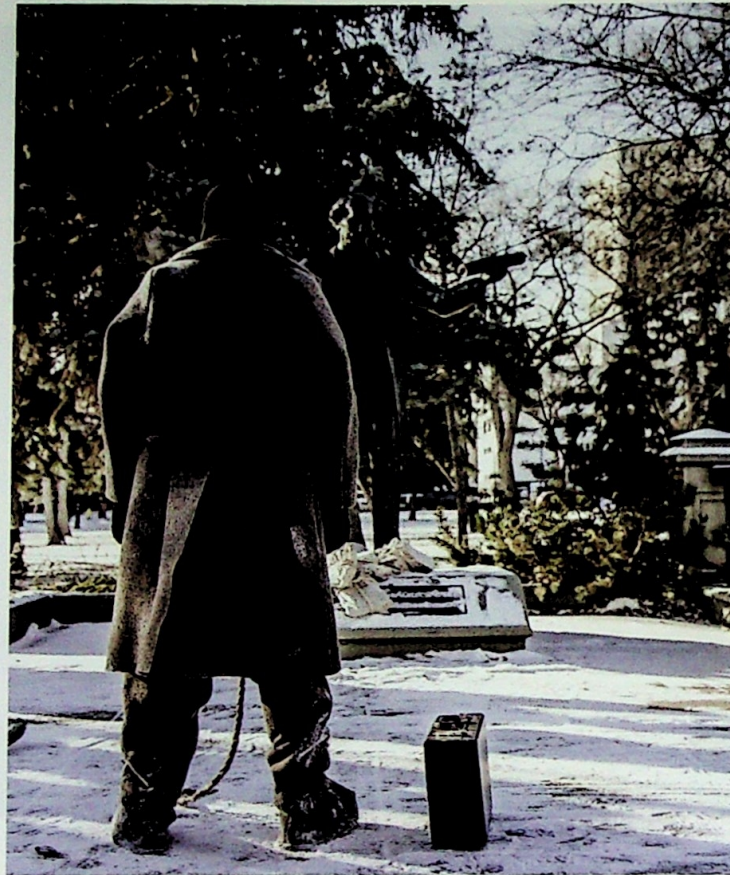
All photos from David Garneau's performance of *Dear John; Louis David Riel* in Regina.

This is how the path for Sir John A.'s railway – built by hyper-exploited Chinese immigrants and used to carry troops to suppress the Métis resistance – was cleared.

For many Canadians, the direct relation between Sir John A. and colonialism begins and ends with Louis Riel, but the historical reality is much different. "Riel and Macdonald are kind of pitted against each other," says Sutherland, "but this ends up overshadowing other Indigenous issues, and makes them seem like a thing of the past. But these issues are ongoing."

Among these ongoing issues are policies like the Indian Act, which was introduced by Sir John A.'s government in 1876 and made Indigenous people wards of the Canadian state. It also defined who qualified as a "status" Indian, and who was therefore eligible for benefits. Sir John A. is also the man responsible for introducing residential schools, institutions now infamous for cultural genocide, physical and sexual abuse, and intergenerational trauma.

These legacies are rarely acknowledged by any of the public monuments commemorating Sir John A., a fact pointed out by Carl and Murray in their quest to imagine how heritage activities might look different. By creating alternative mock plaques that call attention to both the darker side of Sir John A. and to Indigenous histories, they highlight the ways public art might help us better reflect on both the past and the present. In one proposed plaque, they contrast the building of Kingston's Sir J. A. Macdonald Public School in Kingston – which provoked major complaints after opening one year late – with the situation in Attawapiskat First



Nation. The school in Attawapiskat was closed in 2000 after being declared toxic because of a diesel leak. After years of lobbying, a new school (called Kattawapiskak) finally opened in 2014. Regarding Kingston's new school, Carl says, "Naming your school after Sir John A. is pretty offensive, when you start thinking about education for Indigenous peoples. We still live with the effects of Sir John A.'s policies: the residential school survivors, the prisons, the Indian Act, the Métis ... it's all still alive."

After his failed attempt to communicate with the Sir John A. statue via can-and-string telephone in the Kingston performance, Garneau's character burns sweetgrass and dons an Idle No More T-shirt. Garneau says the performed figure then shifts from the dead Louis Riel "to a contemporary Métis who turns his back on Macdonald and all he represents, and re-engages Indigenous practices and worldview."

THIS IS HOW HISTORY IS WRITTEN

Performances like Garneau's, while perhaps small in the context of the many official celebrations of Sir John A., nevertheless impact our cultural imagination. When asked what inspired The Gertrudes' song about Sir John A., Tilson tells me, "I just had a bit of an epiphany with the bicentennial, that this is how history is written: here comes the money, the biased school curriculum, the tourist packaging. I got thinking about who was telling the story and who was and wasn't involved in the conversation. It was a reminder for me of who has the power, and we wanted to do something small to change the conversation."



In the context of ongoing colonialism in Canada, it is Indigenous peoples who have been systematically denied power, and the right to be included in – let alone to guide – the conversation. This is despite the fact that, as Carl notes, settler histories are little more than a “blip” in the bigger picture: “In the grand scheme of things, Kingston has been here maybe 300 years; Sir John A. was born 200 years ago. But we’ve been here thousands of years.”

While Kingston has 11 plaques dedicated to Sir John A., there is no public recognition of Peter E. Jones, a contemporary of Sir John A. and one of the first status Indians to obtain a university education after attending Queen’s University medical school. Jones became an advocate for health and education services for Indigenous peoples.

“Even if nobody reads them, these plaques are permanent inscriptions on the landscape and assert a kind of ownership,” says Murray. “They are like planting a flag. They enforce a reading of the land.”

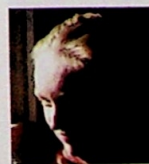
Indigenous art produced by people like Sutherland and Garneau makes space for Indigenous bodies and their presence on this land. “Because colonialism has so much to do with the erasure of Indigenous presence, performance art can bring a feeling of belonging to a space,” says Sutherland. “David wasn’t Louis Riel, but he *is* an Indigenous person in a colonial space. Indigenous art is a really great way to make space for ourselves.”

Garneau agrees, asserting that Indigenous art has transformative potential that extends beyond mere inclusion within liberal multiculturalism. “Indigenous art made without regard

to dominant practice is radically unsettling to Canadians because it exists apart [from], without, and despite them, and is therefore a model for sovereignty.”

Given the strong currents of resistance running through these projects, it isn’t surprising that both Garneau’s performance and *The Gertrudes*’ video created by Amanda Strong conclude with nods to Idle No More. “The one thing that is really positive is the contemporary resistance of Indigenous peoples,” says Tilson. “Idle No More is perhaps the most inspiring grassroots movement I’ve seen in my lifetime. To put Sir John A. history in the context of that is really powerful.”

All the artists agree that the importance of such art lies in its ability to provoke reconsideration of our identities and relationships, to the land and to each other. “Refiguring Riel and Macdonald is not so much about them as about us, how we want to figure ourselves into the future,” Garneau affirms. Artistic engagements with history help us to imagine how more just, decolonized futures might look. ★



JANE KIRBY is a freelancer, writer, and aerial artist currently living in Kingston, ON, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee territory. She has organized with a variety of social justice movements and is interested in the potential of arts for social change.

EAGLECLAW THOM is a photographer and artist who is just trying to keep his head above the rising tide.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE FEDERAL ELECTION

A roundtable discussion

It's an election year in Canada. Stephen Harper and the Conservatives have been in office for nearly a decade, with plans to consolidate their control of the Canadian state with a fourth term. Here is part one of the election panel that you won't see on the CBC and that was too much for the NDP.

By BRIARPATCH STAFF

Portraits by LEYA ANDERSON

IN CONVERSATION

Syed Hussan is an organizer and writer in Toronto who works with undocumented and migrant people, in defence of Indigenous sovereignty, and against war and capitalism.

Erica Violet Lee is a nehiyaw (Cree) Indigenous feminist, a youth organizer for Idle No More and #MMIWG2S, and a philosophy student at the University of Saskatchewan.

Nora Loreto is the author of *From Demonized to Organized: Building the New Union Movement* (2013). She is the editor for the Canadian Association of Labour Media (CALM) and lives in Quebec City.

Derrick O'Keefe is a writer, activist, and dad based in Vancouver. He is a co-founder and editor of Ricochet Media and the author of *Michael Ignatieff: The Lesser Evil?* (2011).

Note: we invited a prominent NDP member of parliament to join this roundtable discussion. She initially agreed to participate but then backed out of it saying that she was uncomfortable with some of the discussion. Part two of our election roundtable will be published online at briarpatchmagazine.com.

Given how ideologically extreme the Conservative Harper government is, and how much systemic damage it has done during its three terms, many people believe this federal election is of grave, historic importance. Do you agree?



Erica Violet Lee

ERICA: I think that every election feels like a chance to start with a "clean slate," but the systems that underpin Canada's electoral processes don't reset. I remember being a kid and getting into politics, and not being happy with Liberals like Martin or Chrétien, but compared to the sheer extent of the damage that Harper has done via legislation like the omnibus Bill C-45, those Liberals seem like a walk in the park. Liberal governance is generally viewed as "business as usual" for Canada, but recall that it was a Liberal government that brought in the two per cent funding cap for First Nations education. So many of the parties hold similar views at this point. It will take a lot more than an election to start to undo 150 years of colonialism.

HUSSAN: An election at the federal level determines who gets to continue making the decisions for a settler-colonial capitalist state. No elections will determine the resurgence of the communities that I care about most: these include undocumented people, migrant workers, sex workers, Indigenous communities, and those impacted around the globe by Canadian policies. Our collective futures won't be determined in these elections. But I do accept that if Harper [were elected for another term], it would be a shift in the historical pattern of the baton going back and forth between the Liberals and the Conservatives.

NORA: For thousands of Canadians, another Harper victory will mean the further elimination of the social programs that they depend on. The Conservatives will finish what they have started: to eliminate fundamental services (like door-to-door mail delivery and the CBC), encourage destructive resource extraction, undo collective bargaining rights, impose increasingly harsh criminal sentences, declare more war, and apply their so-called antiterror legislation. Canada will be fundamentally changed if they win. If we think of the broader structures that oppress many people, I agree with Erica and Hussan: defeating Harper will not bring about systemic change. But I fear that another Harper victory will lead to more death and misery among marginalized and struggling people.

Meanwhile, the Liberals take lessons from how far right the Conservatives can push. Defeating Harper is also part of a broader strategy to give confidence to parties ostensibly on the left that progressive policies can win elections.

DERRICK: I do think Harper winning again would be grave and demoralizing. This would be true especially for the fight against pipelines and climate change. If we can't take out Harper now, after all the scandals and corruption, what hope is there for a government not in the pocket of Big Oil? But I'm afraid in many ways his government and the right-wing movement it grew out of has already made its historic impact on Canadian politics and society. Harper's cohort, those who founded the Reform Party and then effectively refounded the right-wing establishment party, have been remarkably successful, even if they haven't been able to implement or even campaign on their more extreme, socially conservative positions.

Why do you think the Harper Conservatives have been able to maintain significant support for their policies and for their record in Canada?

ERICA: Last year, Harper visited Saskatoon and we organized a last-minute Idle No More rally at the convention centre. About 1,000 people drove past us to enter – almost all white people, and I've never seen so many giant shiny pickup trucks in my life – and as they drove past us we saw them either ignore us or laugh at us. The laughter upset me the most. We were holding



up signs about missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people, about environmental destruction and justice system brutality – who laughs at that?

I strongly believe that the reason the Conservatives have held power comes down to hatred and fear of Indigenous people, migrants, and those whose bodies and voices challenge the myth of Canadian benevolence. They are afraid of us and literally want us destroyed because our very existence is a constant threat to the legitimacy of the Canadian state.

HUSSAN: Most people who live in Canada aren't engaged with or aware of federal government policies. Official politics as it functions here is too obtuse, and too niche, focused on wedge issues. When I am meeting with undocumented people, or migrant workers, or newcomers, at workplaces or in homes, most people aren't aware of the policy changes that impact their lives, much less about trade agreements, water management policy, and the like.

Many Canadian residents believe that foreign workers are stealing Canadian jobs – an all-out xenophobic and racist stance. Harper is playing to dominant fears and dominant ideology, exactly as Erica says. We in social movements have much work to do to build self-determination and anti-racism within our communities.

DERRICK: I agree that a lot of it does come down to racism or latent racism. The Conservatives are, relatively speaking anyway, very sophisticated about it, using dog-whistle frequency racism, mostly keeping within liberal multicultural discourse.

Of course, none of this makes policies of criminalization and deportation less deadly. And on issues like the niqab or the total failure to deal with murdered Indigenous women, the racism isn't so subtle.

I think the Conservatives are also more consolidated and coherent ideologically than either the Liberals or NDP. They also have a lot more money and more means to micro-target and identify voters. Their base is also older, whiter, and richer – the demographics with the highest voter turnouts.



Nora Loreto

NORA: The electoral system and systemic disenfranchisement artificially boost Harper's popularity. Harper plays to the lowest common denominator – white men with racist sympathies, for example – to maintain his majority. And new legislation passed to make voting even harder for many people will help to buoy this limited support. The left needs to take right-wing populism seriously, and learn lessons from it, but it shouldn't pretend that Harper's support is all that strong. Divide-and-conquer politics are very appealing in the current economic climate. Progressives need to find ways to meet these politics head-on and pull support away from the right.

Many concerned people are adopting an ABC ("Anything-but-Conservative") approach to the election. Do you support this strategy?

ERICA: Overwhelmingly, this is the mantra that I hear repeated among left-wing Canadians: ABC. Unfortunately, as Hussan and I have mentioned, ultimately electoral politics in Canada have a colonial foundation, which limits our ability to create lasting changes in people's worldview. I predict a Liberal win, which I

don't believe will do much to reverse the policy of the last decade.

HUSSAN: Even if you believe in engaging with the election, the ABC strategy seems foolhardy to me. For it then allows other political parties to simply position themselves as the only party that can replace Harper. The result will likely be a Liberal government – where Trudeau will make some superficial changes and the overall arc of laws and policies that silence, impoverish, and exclude our communities will continue.

At the very least, I would hope people are pressuring the NDP and the Liberals to take up demands raised by social movements. But I don't see that happening. Within labour, community, social policy, and environmental circles, there is a one-track approach: get rid of Harper. And essentially the highest aspiration is to turn back the clock to pre-Harper days. But for those of us that never had civil liberties, or clean drinking water (like a third of all Indigenous communities in Ontario), or direct access to permanent residency, a return to pre-Harper days is not a panacea, it's continued aggression.



Derrick O'Keefe

DERRICK: Every vote is strategic, since every choice on the ballot is compromised. I don't think participating strategically in an election is a moral question; it's just one of many political decisions we make. In that context, I get that some will choose to vote Liberal in certain ridings even though the NDP or Greens might be closer to their principles. That's a short-term strategic choice. But others might choose longer-term strategic considerations. One implicitly ABC

"Every vote is strategic, since every choice on the ballot is compromised. I don't think participating strategically in an election is a moral question; it's just one of many political decisions we make."

approach is to focus on voter participation from youth and marginalized peoples. Someone should do a version of that old Uncle Sam poster, but with Harper saying, "I want *you* not to vote!"

As someone primarily engaging with this federal election as a journalist and writer, I'm most concerned with the vocabulary that goes along with advocating for ABC. There's this assumption we often see in how people bemoan votes being divided between "progressive" parties: the NDP, Liberals, and Greens. At this point, any reference to the Liberals under Justin Trudeau – who is pro-Keystone XL, pro-Bill C51 – as "progressive" is just intellectually dishonest and unhelpful.

NORA: The ABC strategy (or the other extreme: all progressives should vote NDP) lacks necessary nuance. It erases regional and local differences and it's rooted in fear. People want to vote for something but in the absence of a campaign that inspires, it's too easy to fall into the frame of simply voting against something. This is where grassroots movements and unions have the greatest role: to define what it is that people would like to vote *for* and goad the NDP and Liberals to offer it up.

Another advantage of social movement campaigns is that they can easily evolve to target the government of the day after the election, keeping up the pressure. When you run an ABC campaign and Harper wins, the campaign dies the morning after the election. If you run an ABC campaign and Harper loses, the campaign also ends the next day, doing nothing to exert pressure on the new government.

Some Indigenous activists along with many who oppose Canada's ongoing colonial character believe that participation in electoral party politics weakens resistance movements and undermines self-determination for Indigenous peoples. Others believe that increased Indigenous participation could stop Harper from forming the next government. What's your view?

ERICA: Even working within Idle No More, there's so much contention on this issue. We've settled on the idea of engaging in Canadian electoral politics as harm reduction. I've always voted in federal and provincial elections – not because I believe it's the cure, but because it's one tool in the toolbox. We've all seen the figures that show if Indigenous people all came out to vote, our election impact could be significant, especially in the Prairies.

One thing that Idle No More has changed for me is that I am really conflicted about considering myself Canadian, even though that's what it says on my passport, on my ID. As an urban Cree, you'd think this would make things difficult for me, but on the contrary, realizing how false Canadian nationalism is, next to the tangible power of community belonging, is liberating. How can I feel any pride or investment in Canada when one of the main goals of its project was to eradicate and assimilate people like me? I feel love for the land, for the waters, for the air, for the other creatures on this land – that's where my allegiance lies.

HUSSAN: This is a conversation that will take many turns in many places. I imagine that many newer Indigenous activists will try and participate in the elections since it's the obvious system to engage with (it's the same for any other community). I worry that some may be disappointed or drop out of movements because the elections will inevitably fail to deliver. Many others – as Erica notes – will use the election cycle as a moment of increased media scrutiny, and possibly political debate, to further the long-term project of resurgence and decolonization.

DERRICK: Increased participation from any marginalized community will help to defeat Harper. But I understand the position of Indigenous sovereigntists who don't participate in what they see as colonial elections. Ultimately, I think those on the left need to develop a constitutional approach, beginning to think about refounding Canada in order to decolonize it. I'd say it's a key part of reimagining what a truly radical, transformative political project would be in this country. The left needs to actively debate and think through the failure of its approach to Indigenous struggles historically.

NORA: It's up to all people to decide for themselves. While the context is different, I think there's also a discussion to be had among non-Indigenous people about whether or not voting is important or even necessary. While I'm sympathetic to voices who call for electoral boycotts, it's hard to see how this doesn't play right into the Conservative strategy: to make sure as few oppressed people as possible vote. And, really, as a white Canadian, the men who are ruining things in Ottawa are doing so in my name. I feel a responsibility to do everything I can to confront them. ★

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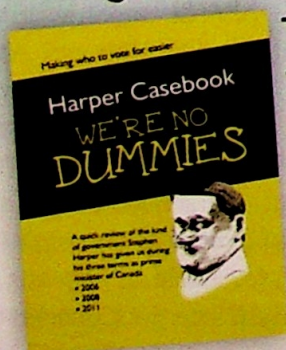


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Permaculture or Spermaculture?

Confronting patriarchy in western permaculture and alternative food movements.

Words and photos by TRINA MOYLES



Women make an immense contribution to permaculture ethics, which include caring for the earth, caring for people, and sharing the surplus, but women are often under-represented in permaculture's dominant forms of knowledge dissemination.

For Halena Seiferling, a master's of policy studies student at Simon Fraser University, it's a question generated not from facts or statistics, but from one of the most essential principles of permaculture: observation.

"I started to wonder about some of the voices, typically male, that were leading the conversation about challenging local food systems," Seiferling says. "They seemed to favour liberalism over facing and actually addressing social injustice."

Seiferling began her permaculture education four years ago in Cuba, the island nation that's been internationally recognized for surviving a crash in oil imports (following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989) in part by undoing and diversifying conventional agriculture, and also by institutionalizing

permaculture, a holistic and sustainable food systems design for achieving "permanent culture."

In May 2011, Seiferling was among 10 Canadian women selected to participate in a permaculture design course (PDC) at the Antonio Nuñez Jiménez Foundation for Nature and Humanity (FANJ) in Sancti Spiritus. Together, the Canadian women collaborated with Cuban permaculturalists to design and transform a peri-urban farm into a permaculture system, integrating ethics of transforming waste into wealth and maximizing biodiversity.

"The Cubans were surprised that our group was made up of women only," recalls Seiferling.

But the program's Canadian coordinator, Ron Berezan, a permaculture designer and instructor with The Urban Farmer in Powell River, B.C., was not at

all surprised by the gender imbalance in Seiferling's program.

"In most [permaculture design] courses I've taught and organized, there have been more female students than male students. It's actually disconcerting to me that we can't get more men to take the courses," says Berezan, who's been teaching permaculture in western Canada and Cuba for almost 10 years.

"But why is it that when men get into the stream of this movement they absorb a lot of the leadership? Of course, I have to count myself among them," he adds.

It's a question that's beginning to surface more frequently in the minds and actions of female and male permaculturists and food producers alike in North America: are alternative food systems and movements shaped and dominated by the leadership of men?



Women in western permaculture tend to be more actively involved in community work that is unpaid and unacknowledged by the larger alternative food movement.

Bonita Ford is a permaculture design instructor and co-founder of the Permaculture Institute of Eastern Ontario. Ford is a woman of colour and says that she has not personally felt held back from any experience in her permaculture career because of her identity.

"I look through the lens of gender, ethnicity, and culture in different areas of my life," says Ford, "And it recently came up again through the permaculture community."

In 2013, Ford attended a workshop for women in permaculture organized by the Omega Institute in Rhinebeck, New York.

She recalled an activity that made her "open [her] eyes," whereby facilitators asked women to answer a series of questions about women's involvement in and contribution to permaculture in their communities by voting with their feet and taking a step forward. Though she had "sensed it" before, Ford was surprised by the visible results of the activity.



"It was interesting to see that mini-collection of data," says Ford.

"That spread of, yes, women do show up as teachers, women do show up as authors, but less than men, and where women are most actively involved right now around community involvement ... they are not getting paid for it."

"It's a reflection of what we see historically in society," Ford comments. "Women take on roles that are important yet not compensated or recognized [by society]."

Ford and other permaculturists claim women's contributions to the

permaculture and local food system movements are immense, yet they are under-represented in forms of dissemination and recognition, including at conferences and in courses, textbooks, and online.

"The higher superstar permaculture teachers are almost always men," agrees Berezan, who casts a look back at the original founders of the permaculture movement who, he says, could be described as the "permaculture patriarchs."

In 1978, Bill Mollison and David Holmgren, two white Australian men,

synthesized various facets of existing sustainable agriculture principles into what they termed "permaculture."

Although described as a decentralized movement, it would be easy, even for an outsider, to argue that white male leadership continues to shape Western permaculture. A simple Google image search of "permaculture instructors" brings up over 50 per cent more white males than female, Indigenous, or visible minority instructors.

The more contemporary superstars of permaculture could include U.K.-based Geoff Lawton, the Greening the Desert food forestry guru, along with Joel Salatin, an American family farmer and outspoken advocate for locally raised food.

Lawton recently launched an online permaculture course, challenging the traditional 14-day Permaculture Design Certificate course, which, according to Berezan, attracted well over 1,000 students. Both Lawton and Salatin have published books, taught courses, and are highly sought-after speakers at conferences all over the world. They've planted themselves firmly into the North American food movement, and as some would argue, dominated the movement's conversation.

"*Spermaculture* is a term coined by women and queer folks to name the ways that permaculture projects are often dominated by white, middle-class men who [can be] outspoken and overbearing," says Nick Montgomery, a PhD student in the cultural studies program at Queen's University.

Montgomery's research explores the ways that people are cultivating alternatives to the dominant order of heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism, with a focus on permaculture and local food movements.

"I think many of the gendered divisions in food movements today reflect broader systems of oppression," says Montgomery.

"White, cis-gendered, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied men are some of the most visible and vocal leaders in the food movement because we're socialized

to be competitive, individualistic, assertive, and authoritative. We tend to talk first, loudest, and longest, and we're often rewarded and encouraged when we do."

Some women who are working in alternative food systems have chosen to temporarily step away from the permaculture movement in North America. Angela Moran was one of the first urban farmers in Victoria, B.C., and has over 10 years' experience applying permaculture principles to growing food in the city.

She admits that most of the "big players" in permaculture are men, and many have never come to see her urban farm.

"I've not been invited much to teach in areas that are being headed up by men," Moran says.

"Maybe it's just that I'm busy, maybe they think, 'she's got a kid, she's got a farm' – I don't know what it is, but it's made me understand the permaculture movement from a different perspective and what it's really doing."

Berezan describes permaculture as a "young movement" that lacks self-awareness and criticism in many ways. While Bill Mollison founded and introduced permaculture as a scientific movement, today's generation of permaculturists are continually pushing for the inclusion of social dynamics, including gender dynamics, in discussions.

"If it's care of the earth, care of people, and sharing the surplus, human dynamics have to be a part of that and the social analysis needs to be a part of that," says Berezan.

In eastern Ontario, Ford credits the recent work of Karryn Olson-Ramanujan, a permaculture teacher, designer, and co-founder of the Finger Lakes Permaculture Institute. Olson-Ramanujan published an article in the *Permaculture Activist* magazine in August 2013 called "A 'Pattern Language' for Women in Permaculture." The article explores the patterns of issues that women face in

permaculture communities and offers practical solutions for making permaculture more accessible to women.

"Karryn's article focuses a lot [on] alliances, and things men can do to try and make more space for women in their courses and communities," says Ford.

"The article proposes simple ways to make the classroom more welcoming – to prep the teachers and the class to be aware

"The higher superstar permaculture teachers are almost always men."

of their communication, especially the teachers. If there's a woman in the group, to not interrupt her; to give her the floor."

"In a large class, being able to see the front of the room is important," Ford explains. "If people are standing, men tend to be taller, and just having the courtesy and awareness to share the space makes a difference."

Moran agrees that challenging gender roles and striving for sensitivity in communication plays a key role in making permaculture more accessible to women and diverse groups.

She acknowledges the efforts of male permaculture instructors in her community who are gradually becoming more aware of power and privilege, and building alliances with women and other diverse groups for increased social inclusion in the movement.

"Permaculture has all of the solutions," Moran stresses. "We just have to make sure that it gets into all the right minds of the sons and the daughters of the colonialists who created our current food system." ★



TRINA MOYLES is a freelance journalist who frequently adventures across Canada, East Africa, and Latin America. She is currently wrapping up

research with women farmers and producers from seven different countries for a book called *Women Who Dig*.

The Meaning of Elections for Six Nations

Within Six Nations of the Grand River – the most populous First Nations band in Canada – there is a stark divide between the people and their elected council. Six Nations writer Alicia Elliot explores how historic tensions – between the band council, the traditional governance council, the Canadian state, and grassroots people – are playing out on the Six Nations Reserve today.

By ALICIA ELLIOTT

Photos by LAYNE BECKNER GRIME and JIM WINDLE

I'm standing there for less than a minute when Terrylynn Brant tells me to grab a chair. I pull one from the neat stacks in the hallway and linger uncertainly.

"Join our circle," she says. It's more of a horseshoe shape at present – only five women are there before I settle in.

I'm passed a long sheet of paper to hold: a photocopy of a statement from the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council on the alcohol referendum. This is why we're here this Saturday morning instead of sleeping in or running errands

ownership, \$2.2–4 million in revenue, and 145 jobs in the first couple years. Since economic prospects on Six Nations are slim – in 2009, the unemployment rate on-reserve was three times that of Ontario – the brewery seems like a good option. But our peoples have a fraught relationship with alcohol and before there can even be a brewery on Six Nations, there are some legalities to sort out.

When the Indian Act officially lifted the ban on on-reserve alcohol sales in 1985, it left a gap in legislation. In 1988, the SNEC tried to hold a referendum on whether to allow alcohol sales or restrict them, but the issue proved so contentious that they cancelled the referendum altogether, passing a band

council resolution that no council would ever bring up the issue again.

Yet here we are: in a small but fierce circle in the atrium outside the Six Nations Community Hall, watching other community members cast their ballots. The women here won't be doing that, though they do feel very strongly about keeping alcohol sales outside of the community.

"If I vote, and I participate, and one kid dies, I'd feel guilty about that," says

Brant. Indeed, the odds aren't exactly in our peoples' favour: alcohol-related deaths are six times more likely for First Nations peoples than for our non-Native peers.

The HCCC agrees with Brant. Their statement reads: "After careful reflection and consideration of the damaging effects that alcohol has had on our people and continues to have ... the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council does not support the manufacturing or retailing of alcohol or drugs and are opposed to any effort to bring danger into our Territory."

Since the referendum was announced, passionate letters have splashed across the editorial pages of local newspapers.

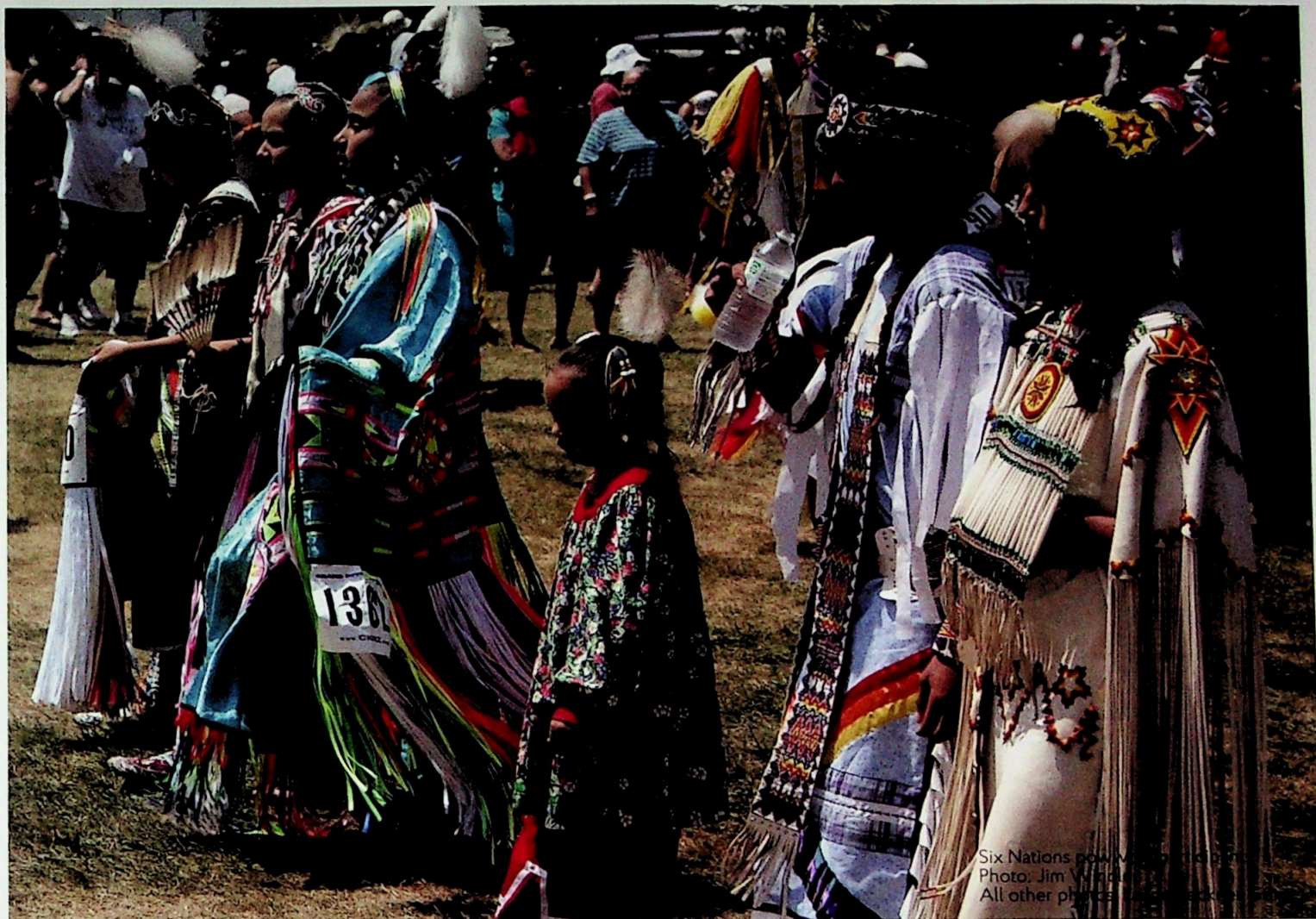
There's no shortage of strong opinions. But faith in the electoral system – that's another matter. Brant is representing what she has dubbed "the silent majority": the more than 18,000 eligible community members who refuse to take part in the elected council system. This silent majority is currently in a bind: if they don't vote, the future of their community is out of their hands. If they do vote, they're supporting the paternalistic, colonial system that has negatively shaped their lives since contact.

This is hardly the first time Six Nations – the most populous reserve in Canada

Just five per cent of eligible voters participated in the 2013 band council election.

or, in my case, binge-watching the TV show *The Mindy Project*. This is the latest skirmish on Canada's largest reserve in a decades-long struggle between the original Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council (HCCC) and the Canada-backed and imposed Six Nations Elected Council (SNEC).

In November 2014, the SNEC received an offer from IPA Enterprises Inc. to build an alcohol brewery in the Oneida Business Park, promising 90 per cent



– has had a problem with their elected politicians. The most recent Six Nations band council election, in November 2013, had a turnout of only 1,057 voters out of an eligible 20,520. That's an appalling five per cent voter turnout – and the current chief, Ava Hill, won by a mere two votes. Although these leaders are technically democratically elected, to call government based on such a small turnout "representative" is more than a stretch – it's a lie.

But as Hazel Hill, director of the Haudenosaunee Development Institute (HDI), points out, that has never been the Canadian government's concern.

"They don't care about the treaties. They don't care that the band council is a minority government," says Hill. "They don't look at how their system relates to our system and the impact it's had."

Of all the social divisions in Six Nations (lacrosse teams, powwow

decisions, who has the best corn soup recipe), the biggest, most heated split is courtesy of Canada and the Indian Act, and it remains entrenched: the division between the Six Nations Elected Council and the HCCC.

DAWN OF THE ELECTED COUNCIL

The tale of the elected council coming to Six Nations is as sordid as a classic gangster film, all betrayals and broken allegiances. Despite numerous treaties and promises, the government of Canada refused to stop non-Native squatters from squirrelling away our land base and prevented us from accessing funds supposedly "held in trust" for our people. Eventually, the Confederacy's patience wore through. In 1923 they sent Cayuga Chief Deskaheh, or Levi General, to the newly formed League of Nations to plead

for the Haudenosaunee's right to be considered a sovereign nation.

Angry at the negative international light Deskaheh's efforts were shining on Canada, the head of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, ordered an investigation into Six Nations, looking for anything that would discredit Deskaheh and allow Canada to install its own government. A vocal minority of Six Nations "Loyalists" were eager for this to happen, asking Canada to bring in an elected council. Aided by the findings of Scott's questionable investigation and the pleas of these "Loyalists," the Canadian government passed a royal proclamation "dissolving" the Confederacy on October 7, 1924. The RCMP promptly descended on the council house, occupying the premises and preventing the Confederacy from entering. Six Nations was officially a "democracy" – which is ironic, since

SIX NATIONS

Until recently, the Haudenosaunee or "people of the longhouse" were referred to as the Iroquois by Canadian and American settlers. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy, said to have existed since time immemorial, includes six nations: the Seneca, Cayuga (Gayogohó: no'), Oneida, Onondaga, Mohawk (Kanien'kehá:ka), and Tuscarora (who joined the original five nations in the 18th century).

Prior to contact, the Haudenosaunee were horticulturalists who lived year-round in stockaded villages. The basic social unit was matrilineal where several matrilineages combined to form a clan.

Six Nations is the largest First Nations band in Canada with more than 25,000 members.

The reserve is located near Brantford, ON, about 25 km southwest of Hamilton.

According to the band council website, there are 18 churches and approximately 300 businesses on the reserve.

An estimated 20 per cent of the on-reserve population is employed in the Six Nations tobacco industry.

The acreage of the Six Nations Reserve is roughly five per cent of the original 950,000 acres of land granted in the 1784 Haldimand Treaty.

Many believe that the participatory, democratic model of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy's constitution directly influenced the drafters of the American Constitution.

Hazel Hill, director of the Haudenosaunee Development Institute



the HCCC had influenced that most celebrated and foundational of documents for modern democracy, the American Constitution.

The imposition of the elected council wasn't exactly welcomed by Six Nations people. Eight hundred adults swiftly signed a resolution opposing Canada's actions. There was such resistance, the American lawyer and Indigenous ally George Decker reported, that while the election was only for 12 band councillors, "It turned out that 12 Six Nations men willing to serve could not be found

... without including several Six Nation [men] in the employ of the Canadian government." Apparently Canada had not fully thought through its coup.

Not that it mattered. The first election of the "Mountie's council" was based on 56 ballots, which Chief David Hill Sr. claimed were simply the result of a mere 26 people voting multiple times. In a twist fit for a soap opera, one of the band councillors elected was none other than David General, Deskaheh's own brother. The Six Nations Elected Council's first act was to swear allegiance to the King. This

was followed quickly with a resolution deeming all money raised for Deskaheh and his League of Nations claim "illegally obtained."

Ever since that fateful day in 1924 when Canadian "democracy" arrived, there has been palpable tension between the elected council and the Confederacy council, which didn't buckle under the authority of a piece of paper and refused to dissolve. There was even a court case in 1973 to determine the rightful leaders of Six Nations (*Isaac et al. v. Davey et al.*). Ontario Justice John Harty Osler ruled in favour of the Confederacy, saying "the Council of Hereditary Chiefs have by far the better claim to the management of the premises in question" while the band council's "representative character is ... seriously in doubt." But the ruling was overturned on appeal, leaving things on Six Nations unchanged.

CONTESTED AUTHORITY

The SNEC and HCCC have rarely, if ever, seen eye-to-eye. This is a frustrating reality for current SNEC Chief Ava Hill, whose election campaign was built around bridging this divide and uniting the community.

"I think there's a role for both of us and I think we need to sit down and figure out what that is," she says. "I've sent [the HCCC] a letter asking to meet with me and they've refused."

That has not stopped Chief Hill from pressing ahead. She has lobbied local, provincial, and federal governments over everything from land claims to education reform to legislation targeting the Six Nations tobacco industry. Though the effects haven't been substantial, the fact that these steps could be taken at all shows how far we've come from the complicit puppet council of 1924. One can hardly imagine a councillor like David General, who voted against aiding his own brother, lobbying against the Canadian government's racist legislation.

Still, the historical ties between the Canadian government and the Six Nations Elected Council continue to

The Six Nations Elected Council's first act was to swear allegiance to the King.

taint the way the SNEC is seen by the people.

Brant, for example, calls it "a master/servant, father/son relationship. It is not a relationship of equals," she says. "We'll always be thought of as having to get permission or having to abide by someone else's rules."

Considering the recent controversy over the First Nations Financial Transparency Act (FNFTA), whereby band councils are legally obligated to make not only their salaries but also all other band-related income public to all Canadians, that seems like a pretty good estimation. In a bullying tactic, the Canadian government has withheld funding for nearly 50 bands that have not complied with this legislation. Bands like Barriere Lake have claimed they cannot comply, as they haven't had access to funds or records since the government imposed third-party management three years ago. As if withholding funding weren't enough, Canada is officially suing six bands that have refused to comply with the FNFTA.

Six Nations gives much, much more than it receives, says Chief Hill. While the elected council has faced continued cuts to its combined \$44 million provincial and federal budget, Grand River Enterprises, a licensed tobacco company on Six Nations, pays over \$160 million in excise taxes per year to the Canadian government. (Tell me again that Indians don't pay taxes.)

Though the SNEC has complied with the FNFTA, the Canadian government's actions against non-compliant bands are a troubling reminder of who holds the real power in this scenario, calling to mind how Sir John A. Macdonald starved Indians on the Plains to force western expansion. The recent tactics don't surprise Chief Hill.

"They'll always threaten us with our funding," she says. "If you don't do this by

such and such a day, then we'll cut your funding.' That's what they're doing with these [other] bands."

Though Chief Hill has described repealing the Indian Act as an "eventual goal," it's hard to imagine such a drastic change could ever be implemented by a band council whose sole source of empowerment and authority is the Indian Act itself and the system it represents. The HDI's Hazel Hill puts it another way: "They're bought. They're bought and paid for."

The HDI was formed by the HCCC in 2007, in response to the 2006 reclamation of Kanonhstaton (Douglas Creek Estates) and the ensuing land negotiations. Since then, they've represented the HCCC on all land development issues, ensuring that all development in the area is done with "perpetual care and maintenance" and with respect to Haudenosaunee interests.

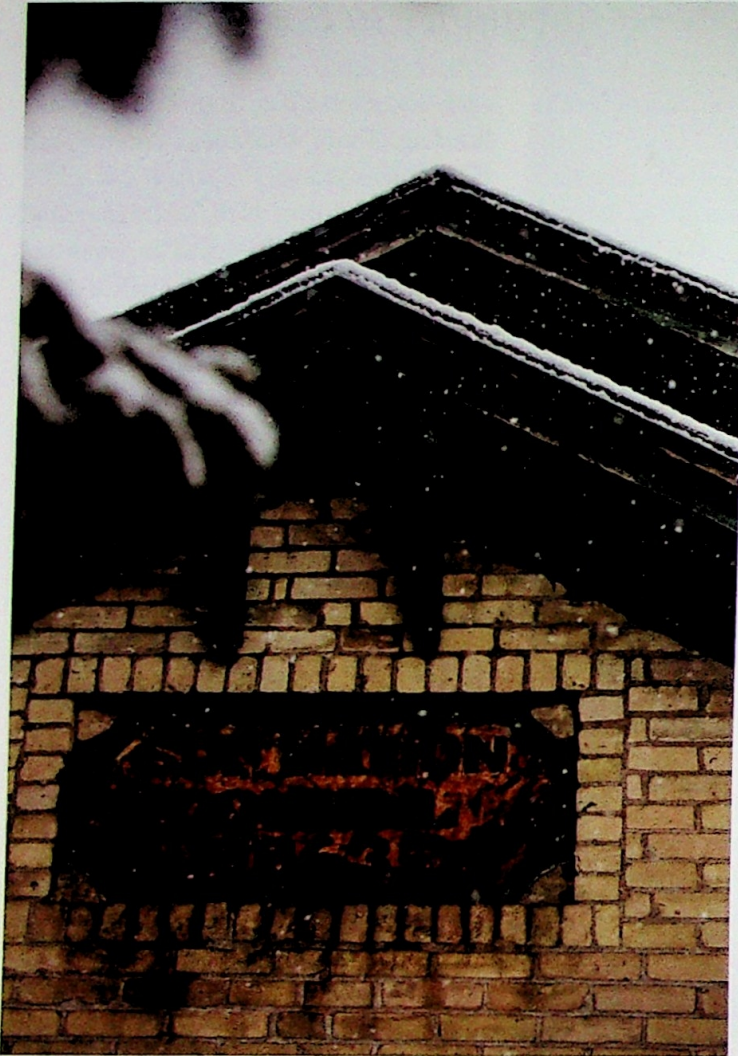
"I like to say HDI is the new Joseph Brant," Hill jokes.

Still, even with this strong showing of sovereignty by the HCCC, Hill acknowledges that Canada's refusal to recognize the HCCC continues to impact our people. She cites instances when even HCCC supporters have sought band council resolutions to support their work in the community.

This isn't uncommon. Every Six Nations youth group I worked with in high school made presentations to both the HCCC and the SNEC. Why would people who didn't back these councillors ask for their support? Because along with Canada's paternalistic, conditional recognition comes badly needed funding, which only the band council can administer.

Those days may be coming to an end, though. Hill says that the HCCC has successfully negotiated over a million dollars a year in energy projects, with

Left: The Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council (HCCC) met in this council house from 1863 until 1924, when the RCMP stormed the building, posted an official declaration dissolving the confederacy, and imposed an elected band council on the people of Six Nations. In 2007, the Six Nations Elected Council handed over keys to the building to the HCCC in a rare display of solidarity. The building is currently being restored for a return to its original use. Right: Hazel Hill.



plans to put resources back into revitalizing language and ceremonies.

"Our people need to wake up and understand that just because Canada is comfortable with the band council, and just because Indian Affairs has created this little system that it can control, does not mean we need that system to go out and get things done."

The women who are sitting in the community hall silently expressing their opposition to the alcohol referendum know this, as did the women who started the reclamation that changed everything for Six Nations back in 2006.

Even the government of Canada knows this. In their 2010 report on First Nations elections, the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples concluded, "Modifying a [band council]

system whose legitimacy is so fundamentally in question does little to begin the real work of reconciliation. We find that implementing lasting change [...] must begin and end with First Nations themselves." This report is evidence, however faint, that there are some within the Canadian government to whom "reconciliation" isn't merely a buzzword bandied about during elections, but an actual goal.

When I ask Hazel Hill what Canada can do, if anything, to repair its relationship with Six Nations, she offers no easy solutions and she does not hesitate.

"That's the one question Canada has to ask itself."

At the end of the day, the results from the referendum come back. With a total of 557 ballots cast, comprising

approximately 3.1 per cent of eligible voters, the people have decided to keep things the same: no regulation, no brewery. It's a rare occasion when the silent majority and the vocal minority – both HCCC supporters and SNEC supporters – are actually in consensus.

While that uneasy truce may not last, this much is certain: the Indian Act may define who Canada considers an "Indian" or deems an official government, but it will never define what we as Indigenous peoples can accomplish. ★



ALICIA ELLIOTT is a Tuscarora woman who lives, writes, and worries she will one day die in Brantford, ON. Her writing has appeared in various anthologies and dark corners of the Internet.

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The New Wave of Food Co-ops

In the midst of an unsustainable and unjust industrial food system, an intergenerational movement of food co-ops is emerging across Canada to create the roots of a co-operative food system.

BY HANNAH RENGLICH

Illustration by JAKE GIDDENS



Food co-ops tend to arise in order to address a community's need for healthy, culturally appropriate, and affordable foods. In the last century, there have been three major waves of food co-op development in North America. The new co-ops emerging across the continent in the current wave are different than their supply-focused ancestors of the Great Depression or their natural foods predecessors of the 1960s and '70s. Unlike those earlier models, the latest co-ops seek to integrate the needs of all stakeholders in the supply chain. They bring farmers, eaters, workers, and even community partners into solidarity with one another – in some cases, sharing ownership of a single enterprise. By sitting around one table, these co-operators are able to negotiate the most complex issues of the food system together.

As democratic enterprises, co-operatives offer their members opportunities to engage in the decision-making processes that govern their operations, wresting power from corporate players and relocating control within their communities. Co-ops are putting power back into the hands of the people who grow the food and helping to turn otherwise alienated food consumers into food citizens. In this wave of their development, Canadian co-ops are also empowering those who process, distribute, sell, and prepare food. In a society where fewer and fewer people are farming, this co-operative translation of food sovereignty principles provides a powerful social tool for repairing and rebuilding our food systems.

In the Digby area of the Bay of Fundy, a co-operative of four bottom hook-and-line fishers has come together to build capacity for local and sustainably harvested seafood. "It's more expensive to fish using the sustainable gear," says Dave Adler, manager at Off the Hook Community Supported Fishery. "The price is determined on the commodity export market with no differentiation around gear type," he continues, "so the people fishing in sustainable ways don't see an added premium for it. Off the

Hook is helping fisher[s] to have more control over the price of the product."

Off the Hook realigns the relationship between the harvesters and their catch as well as between harvesters and local consumers. In Nova Scotia, "people can tell you that it's really hard to get local fish even though we're surrounded by ocean and fishing," says Adler. Off the Hook is reimagining local livelihoods for fishers that don't force them into the role of employees at large, consolidated compa-

In Nova Scotia, "people can tell you that it's really hard to get local fish even though we're surrounded by ocean and fishing."

nies. The community supported fishery, modelled from community supported agriculture, is a way to streamline the supply chain to connect people who eat fish to those who catch it and to secure an income for the harvesters by guaranteeing sales through subscriptions.

While a growing number of eaters are conscious of agricultural issues, fisheries issues are less visible because fishing happens "away." Off the Hook is changing this in Nova Scotia by making fisheries issues more tangible for chefs, retailers, and the general public. The community support model means that customers understand the impact of weather and the elements on food production, as when the full moon and tidal variations prevent the co-op from making deliveries. Taking responsibility by equally sharing the risks and rewards of changing weather patterns among producers and consumers alike engenders a more engaged and active population of eaters.

Consumer education is key to Off the Hook's mandate and it's also a priority shared by Kootenay Co-op in Nelson, B.C. The 40-year-old for-profit consumer-owned co-operative grocery store is committed to consumer education about, awareness of, and engagement with the food system, says the co-op's marketing and outreach manager, Jocelyn Carver. "You can't have food sovereignty and security if

nobody knows what it is," she states. The co-op intentionally creates and follows buying guidelines that promote fair trade and organic, regional, and local foods.

Though Kootenay Co-op is owned by its 12,000 consumer members (in a town with a population of about 10,000), workers and producers play central roles in the co-op's commitment to food sovereignty. Carver says that Kootenay Co-op pays "domestic fair trade prices" for local products, hosts annual meetings with sup-

pliers to tailor supply to demand, and even advertises on behalf of local suppliers who don't have marketing budgets. The co-op employs more than 90 people, making it one of the largest employers in the region.

The Indigenous-owned and -operated Neechi Foods Co-op in Winnipeg takes the importance of dignified employment to another level, simultaneously addressing the need for culturally appropriate food and creating a market for locally made crafts and goods. The co-op addressed the challenges of setting up in a neighbourhood with a relatively transient population by embracing the worker co-op model when it opened in 1990. "We were looking for a model that would best promote a sense of collective business ownership and self-reliance," says Russ Rothney, the co-op's treasurer. Neechi has become a city-wide destination for regionally harvested and processed foods such as fish, wild rice, elk, bison, and the co-op's signature item, bannock. Neechi boasts sales of several hundred loaves each day and honours its commitments to community health by using vegetable oils instead of lard in its recipes.

While no one can out-price the big chains on standard commercial products, Neechi has by far the best prices in the city when it comes to wild rice, local fish, and wild berries; this is due in large part to the co-op's support of Indigenous producers

and harvesters. Another worker co-op, near Wabigoon, ON, supplies much of Neechi's wild rice, processing it using poplar wood-fired ovens rather than the chemical additives normally added for shine and colour. Another Indigenous community corporation, which formed to regain price control from intermediaries that were pitting pickers against one another, has long supplied the co-op with wild blueberries.

Neechi Foods Co-op has also played a pivotal role in lobbying the Manitoba government, which introduced new legislation for multi-stakeholder co-ops thanks in part to Neechi's advocacy. The co-op aims to include consumers, Indigenous suppliers, and possibly other co-ops among its stakeholders, bringing the whole community together in solidarity and ownership of the enterprise.

In Ontario, where many of the recent start-ups are multi-stakeholder co-operatives, food sovereignty has been a unifying theme. The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance recently made a special visit to the West End Food Co-op (WEFC), which operates in Toronto's Parkdale neighbourhood, in order to see these principles in action. The WEFC includes four stakeholder groups (eaters, workers, producers, and community partners) and aims to give each group in the food system a say in the decisions and functioning of the co-operative. In nearby London, ON, a Mondragon-style worker co-operative called Forest City Worker Co-operative has been operating several intertwined co-op enterprises, all guided by the core theme of food sovereignty. Between their organic produce delivery (On the Move Organics), organic café and restaurant (The Root Cellar), microbrewery (The London Brewing Co-operative), and a forthcoming sustainable transportation business, each of the co-op's endeavours hinges on a multi-layered approach where those who do the work and produce the goods are in control.

Both the London- and Toronto-based co-operatives are critical members of an emerging association of more than 75 co-operative food enterprises in Ontario.

This association of co-ops – from Dryden to Niagara, and Windsor to Fitzroy Harbour – has joined together in order to learn from each other's successes and challenges, to share inspiration and ideas, and to build capacity within each co-operative enterprise. This Local Organic Food Co-ops Network is committed to building co-operative, just, sustainable local food systems in Ontario. The network has benefited from the support and mentorship of the Ontario Natural Food Co-op, a 39-year-old federation of food co-ops and buying clubs, and one of only two remaining co-operative food distributors in North America. Such collaboration between co-ops at varying stages of maturity and at every link in the food cycle fosters the intergenerational roots necessary for food system transformation.

In Saskatchewan, the heartland of the first wave of Canadian co-ops, the Farmer Direct Co-op functions as a shared brand for producers focused on family farming, organic production, and food system justice. This approach to values-driven marketing offers farmers an opportunity to engage in domestic fair trade that enables greater control and autonomy, and a higher value for goods sold. Like Ontario's food co-op network, the Farmer Direct Co-op reasserts the value of collective ownership and collaboration rather than competition, values that get at the heart of both food sovereignty and agroecology. Just as biodiversity creates agricultural resilience, shared ownership and deliberative decision-making create the conditions for a thriving co-operative system.

And yet, if the co-operative model is so transformative, fulfilling, and effective, why don't we see it flourishing in every corner of society? As anyone who has worked in a co-operative enterprise will tell you, co-ops require a lot of work. When done right, they take consumers and turn them into citizens; this transformation comes with increased demands for time, dedication, constructive debate, and compromise.

Like most things worth having, co-ops are not easy to create, nor are they

easy to maintain. Within the broader capitalist marketplace, the fiscal health of co-ops can fall victim to their commitment to greater ideological principles. That said, even Conservative Alberta MP Blake Richards, in the parliamentary report of the Special Committee on Co-operatives during the International Year of Co-operatives in 2012, said, "many co-operatives have flourished in tough economic times, when meeting [community] needs was a matter of particular urgency" and where contributions by governments or private industry were lacking. While each wave of food co-op development has seen scores of co-ops go bust, on average, co-operatives enjoy twice the business survival rates of their corporate cousins. It is also important to note that co-ops are particularly successful in places where government support for their development is strong. A cursory glance at regions of the world with strong co-operative movements – the Basque region of Spain, northern Italy, and Quebec – reveals the role of the broader political and economic climate in co-op development and sustainability. In recognition of this, Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada, a national bilingual association, supports research to inform government policy and advocates at the national level to strengthen the co-operative economy.

Food co-ops in Canada are working together to form a strong, connected root system running back and forth across the country, and indeed, around the world, as a co-operative food system emerges in the midst of the monolithic (and thus vulnerable) industrial food system. Canada's growing movement of food and farming co-ops continues to articulate its own mechanisms and policies of food production and distribution, fostering productive relations that are collective, collaborative, and community-owned. ★



HANNAH RENGLICH coordinates the Local Organic Food Co-ops Network and serves on the boards and committees of numerous co-ops.



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WHEN HIPSTERS DREAM OF THE 1890s

Heritage aesthetics and gentrification

By LINDSAY BROWN



Men in British Columbia, 1859, Royal British Columbia Museum

I am as bored of bashing hipsters as anyone. In fact, I may be as fed up with hipster bashing as I am with the hipster phenomenon itself, in all its varieties. What is tiresome about most critiques of hipsters is not that they predictably fixate on the easy target of a repetitive fashion, but that these critiques are almost always superficial and ahistorical. Annoyance over tribal hipster codes is too often itself just tribal. Either that or it never surpasses, "If you're going to look like a logger, better learn how to use a chainsaw" (not that I don't have a lot of sympathy with that sentiment). What we fail to talk about is the fact that hipster aesthetics have some pretty troubling historical antecedents, which, when juxtaposed with current realities, become even more disturbing. What I find chilling is that here in my own place and time, haunted as it is by its colonial history, I'm seeing men adopt a late 19th-century white male frontiersman style and acting as if it has no historical significance.

Why are political-historical critiques of this ubiquitous, nearly decade-old style so absent? Maybe it's because if you even tentatively point out problems with hipster codes in a casual conversation, even non-hipsters can get very exercised about it. Try it. People seem to want to dispute that retro aesthetic references mean anything or have any significant connection to a particular history. You might get dismissive reactions like, "C'mon, meaning is fluid" or "Anything goes these days," or "Just because I'm wearing a haircut we call the 'Nazi Youth' doesn't mean it has anything to do with Hitler; Hitler is dead," and so on. If you propose that aesthetic choices aren't purely random, you quickly find yourself in an unpopular minority in the room.

Unpopular or not, I want to talk about what the "heritage hipster" phenomenon means, particularly now that it is the face of the wave of gentrification hitting Chinatown and other historic neighbourhoods in East Vancouver. Instead of fading

away after a few years the way fashions generally do, this North American pioneer style instead seems to be gathering steam. Is this a coincidence?

As anyone who has watched the satirical Pacific north-west TV sketch show *Portlandia* knows, the "heritage hipster" style harkens back to late 19th-century white males in North America. *Portlandia* dubbed it the "Dream of the 1890s." The style's historical referents are actually all over the place – an amalgam of merchant or pioneer styles from 1850 to 1910, with a little Depression-era 1930s, and some 1940s and '50s laid overtop. But the 1890s (that lesser-known decade of catastrophic economic depression) seems to be its magnetic centre.

THE PEOPLE IN MY NEIGHBOURHOOD

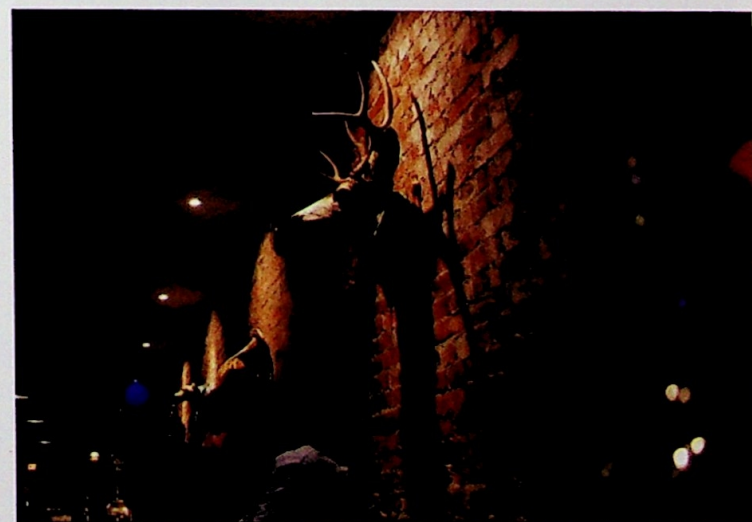
I live in a diverse and historically conflicted part of Vancouver, right at the confluence of Chinatown and an area known as the Downtown Eastside (DTES). It is the oldest part of Vancouver and one of the poorest postal codes in the country. Because it is close to downtown, condo tower developers have recently set their sights on it in what can only be called a land rush, one that our developer-controlled city hall has done nothing to decelerate. In Vancouver's infamous climate of real estate speculation, this neighbourhood is now experiencing skyrocketing rents, renovations, and demolitions that are quickly driving out the neighbourhood's inhabitants: an aging Chinese population, the urban poor, many First Nations people, low-income workers, and the homeless.

"... that Canada should remain a white man's country ... is highly necessary on political and national grounds."

– William Lyon Mackenzie King

Coincidentally – or maybe not – much of this neighbourhood dates precisely from the 1890s. Chinatown was founded in the mid-1880s but only really grew to a noticeable size and population in the following decade. Chinese settlers as well as immigrants of many other origins lived here, working either in the colonial resource economy, including the Hastings Mill, or in the service sector that grew up around it. In other words, this neighbourhood was not solely populated by white lumberjacks or chaps with waxed mustachios who looked as if they'd just exited a barbershop quartet.

In Chinatown, the 1880s, '90s, and early 1900s were marked by constant conflict with a city government that habitually imposed repressive racist laws, including curfews, bans on traditional barbecue (a restaurant and social mainstay), and other regulations clearly targeted at that specific cultural group. This is quite apart from the burden of the federal Chinese head tax of 1885. Tensions ran high in the city, and anti-Chinese racism,



Top, centre: The TV show *Portlandia*.
Bottom: Taxidermy adorns the walls of a hip establishment in Vancouver's rapidly gentrifying Chinatown. Photo: Lindsay Brown

only legitimated by all the racialized regulations, carried with it the threat of intimidation and violence. Finally, on September 7, 1907, white men belonging to a group called the Asiatic Exclusion League marched to Chinatown, beat up dozens of Chinese men, ransacked stores, and broke windows before moving on to the Japanese neighbourhood of Nihonmachi. The resulting riots in Chinatown lasted for several days.

The early history of Chinatown and the DTES is only one element here. As I think most are aware, Vancouver was built on land taken a few decades earlier from Coast Salish peoples – Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish – without so much as a treaty. Of course, this was part of the systematic, Canada-wide process of driving First Nations from their land and way of life by forced removals, deliberate starvation, residential schools, and other tactics that are now relatively well-known. The photo that opens this article, the one showing bearded white men in B.C. in 1859, was taken smack in the middle of this era, as was the photo below.



1859, Royal British Columbia Museum

While some of this racist local history may be known, it seems that many Canadians still aren't aware that this was an era of overt white supremacy. It appeared at all levels of government, from local Vancouver city politics to the provincial legislature, to laws enacted by prime ministers John A. Macdonald and William Lyon Mackenzie King. Even if the general Vancouver public knows little of the details of early colonial history, there have been so many high-profile reconciliation efforts in recent years that anyone who lives here and who doesn't at least vaguely sense these histories would seem to be indulging in some degree of studied oblivion. In B.C. and across the country, there has been a marked resurgence of actions by First Nations, notably against resource development on traditional lands but also to address long-standing urban and housing issues. Idle No More, a movement initiated by three First Nations women and a settler ally in December 2012, was a clear sign of an Indigenous population increasingly organizing

against a colonial system that, like the Indian Act of 1876, still persists. In 2014, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission finished its hearings on issues that included residential schools; the year also saw the dramatic Supreme Court win for First Nations in the Tsilhqot'in decision.

Three key non-white communities in B.C. also experienced a reconciliation or reckoning of racist history in 2014. There was the 100th anniversary of Vancouver's shameful Komagata Maru episode (in which a ship bearing South Asian immigrants was refused landing in Vancouver harbour before being sent back to a perilous future), which included a federal apology to the Indian community; there was the City of Vancouver's apology for the Second World War internment of Japanese Canadians; and finally, there was the B.C. apology to Chinese Canadians for the 1885 head tax. However, these well-publicized processes have been concurrent with the accelerated luxury condo development in the exact neighbourhoods often associated with these communities. And into that complex matrix blithely walks a neatly coiffed, Paul Bunyan-style frontiersman.

"You can never make good Canadian citizens of them or their descendants and it is just as necessary to keep them out as it is to keep out the Chinese. Most of them are big strapping fellows, men who have fought in British regiments in the little Indian wars, but their ideas and their ways are not ours, nor can they ever be so. These people from India come here alone just like the Chinese, and nothing on earth could make them Canadians."

– R.G. Macpherson, Vancouver MP, to Prime Minister Laurier, September 21, 1906

Now that this 1890s lumberjack style has solidly entered the mainstream, I think it is fair to start asking a few questions. Even if you could, for yourself, somehow surgically remove the colonial pioneer aesthetics of that time from their origins, how can you guarantee that others will deem your efforts a success? What fantasy 1890s are you in, exactly? What if, inadvertently or not, you are helping to whitewash Canadian history, and what if lumberjack nostalgia functions to romanticize and legitimate the colonial system and economy we still live under in Canada, and particularly in B.C., with its ever-colonial resource extraction (exporting raw logs) and its nearly perpetual urban land rush?

SETTLERS REDUX

A couple of years ago, as buildings in Chinatown and the DTES emptied out for planned condo developments, and as storefronts became available either as placeholders or as deliberate window-dressing for future condo locations, hipster joints full of antlers and other pioneer accoutrements began to appear overnight. There was no visible attempt to work with the local historic context. Shops with ampersanded "anglo" names arrived (Jones & Smith? Smith & Wesson? Bear & Buck? I can't remember), and so did restaurants with generic settler and frontier decor. I am not suggesting that incoming merchants should have adopted a twee chinoiserie aesthetic and everything would have been fine. But for many local residents, all this dressing and decorating like a white 1890s settler in Chinatown seemed audacious, especially in the context of a wave of condo-driven gentrification.

From an ad for The Wohlsein, a "boutique" condo development in East Vancouver. Accompanying text reads, "Reassuringly old. Refreshingly new."



I had wanted to write about this style for years, but it was the recent confluence of all these elements that suddenly threw the 1890s hipster period drama into starker relief. In light of both the history of Chinatown and the DTES, this style of dress and boutique chic looked disingenuous at best and blatantly colonial at worst. The alibi usually given for this fashion is that it expresses a desire to return to a DIY, pre-consumer-capitalist style of craftsmanship, but since there are so many other aesthetics that hipsters could have chosen to fulfill this function, this explanation doesn't wash. And the defence that the style is meant to be ironic seems weak. I don't detect any real irony in it – quite the opposite – but if irony is the intent, who is that irony for?

As an aside, I would also add that even without the racial and colonial issues, I'd have a problem with this style for reasons involving its disingenuousness around gender and class. There isn't space here to deal with its element of class tourism, but the gender component is more disturbing. Why has there been no discussion of this style's near-100 per cent male adoption? A casual survey suggests that no one can identify a true female equivalent, or at least not one that is worn in the public realm. (Tellingly, burlesque and Victoria's Secret were suggested as the probable match.) Indeed, how could women (white, let alone non-white) adopt an 1890s' style in the same casual way?

Somehow I don't feel like wearing long dresses and not having the vote. For that matter, the heritage hipster is only one of many traditionally masculine styles that are currently being dusted off with a great deal of enthusiasm and that seem nostalgic for some sort of old-school white masculinity. For anyone who thinks this reinstated male code isn't a serious affair, note the high-profile case in Regina last year in which a frontier-style hipster place called Ragged Ass Barbers refused to give a signature male haircut known as a "hard part" to a prospective female customer purely on the grounds she was not male (they don't serve women).

Brochure for The Wohlsein. Text at bottom reads, "Snappy Dressers. It's Always Been a Mount Pleasant Thing."



So. Are our historical aesthetic references innocent or not? Are fashion and culture in general not a bellwether? Let's briefly entertain the opposing view – that style does not express often-unconscious desires, and that culture consists of items that spin meaninglessly in a blender, conveniently unmoored from history. In that scenario, how is one style ever chosen over any other? Are our choices purely random? Is it merely an accident that people have retained an 1890s aesthetic for more than nine straight years – highly unusual in fashion – in this time and place? Or is it a deeply meaningful code designed to assert a particular type of historical entitlement, in terms of white male privilege generally and land title in particular? Increasingly, it seems that heritage hipsters are appropriating the garb of an earlier colonial era as an aesthetic cover for their entrepreneurial role in this one, all while overwriting local history with their own self-justifying myth of origin. This is one of the few instances where I agree with the otherwise annoying New Age maxim that everything happens for a reason.★



LINDSAY BROWN is a Vancouver writer, civic activist, and designer. Her book on Vancouver's Habitat Forum conference of 1976, the world's first global meeting on human settlements, will be out in September 2015 with Black Dog Publishing. She is the communications director and co-founder of Commons B.C. This article first appeared on the blog of her sustainable textile company, Ouno Design.

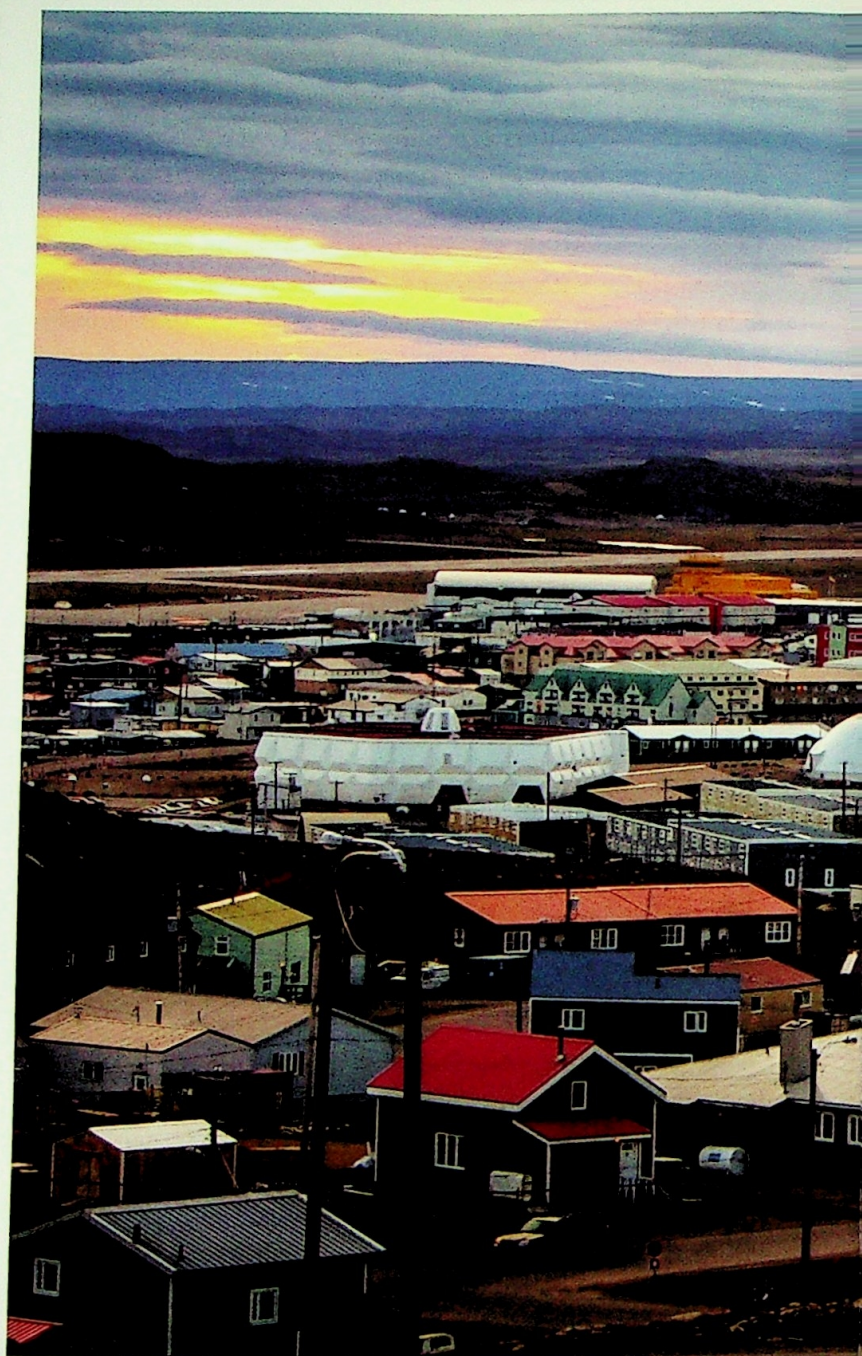
Struggling for Food Security in Nunavut

An interview with Israel Mablick, Leese Papatsie, and Jannie Wing-sea Leung of Feeding My Family

Photos by ANUBHA MOMIN

Feeding My Family is a grassroots group that formed in Nunavut in 2012. From Labrador to Alaska, the group has since provided a forum where northerners can come together despite the distances that separate their communities. The Feeding My Family Facebook group works to raise awareness of how the high cost of food has been impacting northern communities and to encourage action from both northerners and southerners.

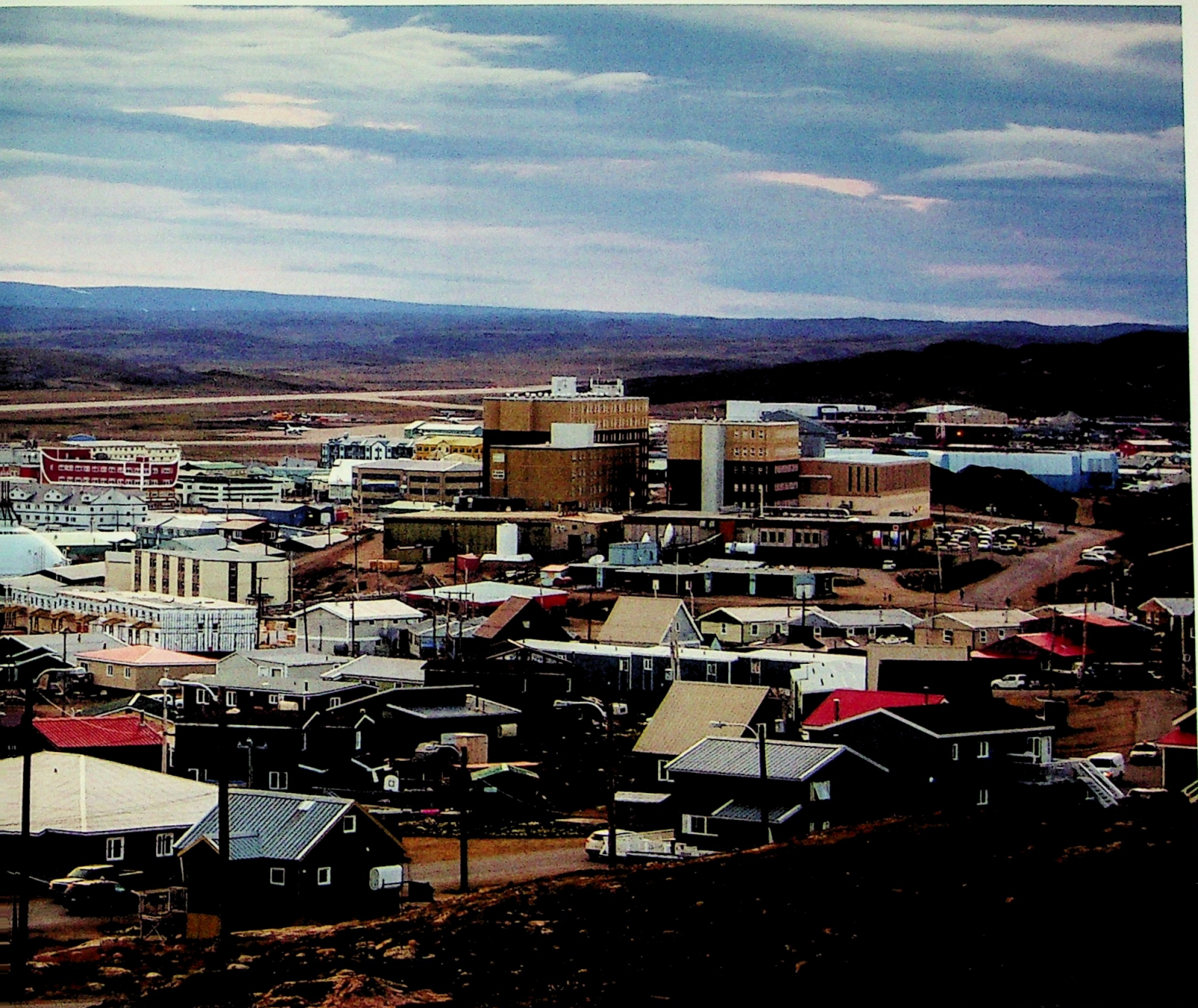
Website: feedingmyfamily.org



Leese Papatsie and Israel Mablick share a laugh

Introductions

ISRAEL MABLICK: I was born in Frobisher Bay, Northwest Territories, now known as Iqaluit, Nunavut, and was raised in Pond Inlet, Nunavut. My mother was a teacher and when I was very young I remember we went to Montreal for a couple of summers. As a boy, this was confusing and a cultural shock. Our family moved to Ottawa, Yellowknife, Cambridge Bay, and back to Iqaluit when my parents divorced. I worked in Igloolik, Nunavut with Nunavut's Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth and in Iqaluit at Quttinirpaaq National Park. I graduated from Nunavut Arctic College in 2005 and moved to Pond Inlet to work at Sirmilik National Park. In 2007, I was elected a councillor for the Hamlet of Pond Inlet for two years, and for my second term



Anubha Momin is a writer, photographer, and communications consultant in Iqaluit and the founder of *Finding True North*. Her words and photos have been published widely. Her cover photo for this issue features Jarloo Nowdlak selling dried char in front of NorthMart in Iqaluit. Location for all photos: Iqaluit.

I was elected deputy mayor. In 2009, I was hired as the constituency assistant for the MLA of Tunnunuiq (Pond Inlet). In 2011, my family and I moved back to Iqaluit, and we have been here since, raising our five wonderful children. We live together with my mother, sister, nephew, and younger brother in a two-bedroom unit, while I work as a security guard.

LEESEE PAPATSIE: I was born in Pangnirtung, Nunavut. We moved to Iqaluit (the capital) when I was young. My parents only spoke Inuktitut and that is my first language. I have two sisters and four brothers. I grew up eating country food, like seal, caribou, fish, polar bear, and beluga whale. We can eat

these raw, cooked, frozen, or dried. There were times when we were hungry growing up; not starving, but hungry. We would have nothing to eat but tea and bannock. I remember when I was a kid, I stole food from the store; that pear tasted so good. Currently, I work for the government of Nunavut in the Parks and Special Places division.

JANNIE WING-SEA LEUNG: I am a community organizer and health worker currently based in Coast Salish Territories (Vancouver). I first became involved with Feeding My Family while living in Iqaluit and continue to support community actions for food justice in the North.



I support these actions and my community. Even though I'm not currently living in the North, I continue to support and be involved with Feeding My Family.

What changes have you seen since the first protests in 2011?

LEESEE: I've seen northerners speak out more on different issues, such as the actions against seismic testing in Clyde River. A lot more people are noticing the food prices and the "best before" dates on foods. We've been encouraging people to take pictures of food prices in their community stores to let others know. We've been encouraging northerners to go out and say this is wrong. There has been a

Why did communities organize the food protests in 2011? How did you get involved?

LEESEE: They organized the protests to raise awareness of the high cost of food in the North and to ask stores not to sell rotten food. There was a guy in Coral Harbour who mentioned on Facebook one Saturday morning that he was tired of the stores selling rotten foods at high prices. And then there were words about starting a protest and a guy saying I'm going to stand in front of NorthMart (the local grocery store). Community members gathered outside the store and did their first protest to come together as one, to protest the high cost of food. Then there was another protest.

I know in the North, due to isolation and the extremely high cost of travel between communities, northerners use Facebook to connect to their relatives and friends. We created a Facebook group to ask community members to stand together.

ISRAEL: Communities gathered to protest because they also got tired of companies like the North West Company and Arctic Co-operatives Limited price gouging for far too long. They wanted to help others who struggle on a daily basis; they wanted to make a difference.

I saw one person protesting, and it started me thinking. Like him, I too struggle, and I know of others who struggle more, so I decided to take action, too. To stand up where others can't. I joined Feeding My Family to fight against price gouging, so we Nunavummiut can be and feel part of this country of ours.

JANNIE: I got involved two years ago when I was living in Iqaluit. There was a lot of attention and momentum around the food protests and the pictures of the food prices being posted on the Facebook page. I was lucky that I had a steady job and was able to pay these prices, but this made it all the more important that

lot of media coverage of the protests and the boycott organized by Feeding My Family, and a lot more support online. For the Inuit, right at the beginning it was hard, because it has not been in the Inuit tradition to protest.

Talking about food hunger in the North does not seem so "wrong" anymore. There is a lot more understanding of the northerners' situation, how food insecurity is a complex issue. Other parts of the North have been posting pictures of food prices on the site as well. There is more interest and more understanding not just in Canada but all over the world.

There has been a lot of interest on the political level as well. Feeding My Family has been mentioned numerous times in the Nunavut legislature and in Parliament. The Nunavut government's Food Security Strategy and Action Plan came out in May 2014 (they had been working on the plan since the creation of Nunavut). Now the Nunavut Food Security Coalition has been having regular meetings to work on this plan.

ISRAEL: People outside of Nunavut are now more educated about the daily struggles we face as Nunavummiut, with the price gouging and suffering. Our voices have been heard. This is just the beginning and we could go further but we need to know what our next steps are. Because we live all over the place, it makes it hard to organize.

What challenges has Feeding My Family faced?

LEESEE: The biggest challenge I found with Feeding My Family is that some people deny that there's hunger. Sometimes there are negative responses online. People who did not go hungry growing up have a harder time understanding. But hunger is still very much there; there are still people who have not eaten today.

When Feeding My Family first started, it started to go in different directions, and it was good that we were able to stay

focused on this. Some want to direct our attention to the airlines, to the governments and the Inuit organizations, and we understand that. But Feeding My Family is about the high cost of food. If another person or group would like to take a different direction, they can take the lead on it. What we have started is just part of the story.

JANNIE: In small communities, there can be real consequences to challenging people in positions of power or authority. We've heard from some people that store managers were harassing them for taking pictures of the food or posting on Facebook, and in some communities this is the only store to get groceries from. So now people can send us their pictures or messages privately, and we will post it for them anonymously as the site administrators. We try to make sure the site is a space for northerners to be able to share their experiences and speak out. For example, sometimes we see judgmental comments being made when people post pictures of really expensive pop and candy in the stores, and there are others telling them they should be making healthier food choices. We always remind people that, in these remote communities, it often isn't a choice to buy healthy food – the healthy food is often rotten or really expensive.

Now that the Facebook group has grown to over 24,000 members, one challenge is how to keep the focus on northerners and Inuit. A lot of people have started their own groups now, for their own communities or focusing on a specific topic.

It's really encouraging to see people organizing in this way.

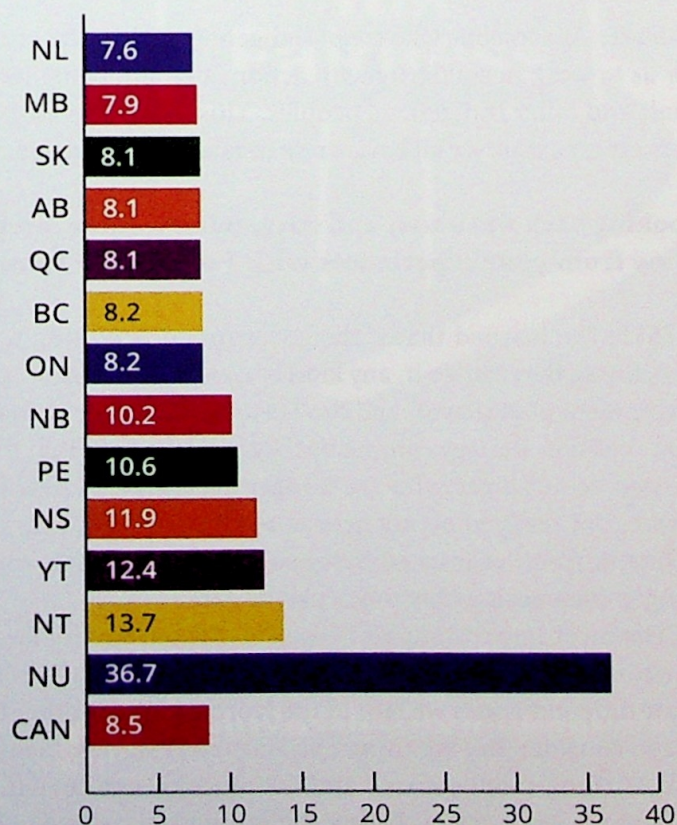
What have been the effects of documenting food prices on Facebook and the other community actions?

LEESEE: I think it's had a lot of impact on the federal Nutrition North program that subsidizes northern retailers for the shipping costs of healthy foods. The program says the subsidy will trickle down to customers, but northerners have been saying all along that it has not been lowering prices. There was an outcry and the politicians listened. The public did that. Members of the Nunavut legislative assembly, as well as those of the Northwest Territories and Yukon, requested the auditor general of Canada audit the Nutrition North program. In the fall of 2014, the auditor general released its report, where it could not verify whether northern retailers were passing on the savings to customers.

JANNIE: The auditor general's report really validated what communities have been saying all along, and the pictures were proof. It makes a strong point that community voices need to be listened to, that they're telling us how these policies actually look on the ground and what's not working.

Food prices in Nunavut are 140 per cent higher than the rest of Canada and at the same time, the two main stores that operate in northern communities make big profits.

Percentage of Households with Food Insecurity



FOOD INSECURITY IN CANADA

According to the Statistics Canada definition, food insecurity exists within a household when one or more members do not have access to the variety or quantity of food that they need due to lack of money.

Nearly 37 per cent of households in Nunavut lack sufficient access to safe and healthy food – a level that is four times the national average.

Among the provinces, the Maritimes has the worst food security.

In 2011–2012, the rate of food insecurity in Canada was more than three times higher in households where government benefits were the main source of income (21.4 per cent) compared with households with an alternate main source of income (6.1 per cent).

Among various household types, lone-parent families with children under 18 reported the highest rate of household food insecurity, at 22.6 per cent.



Colonization is a major cause of the current food crisis in Nunavut, with Inuit being relocated into permanent settlements, sled dogs being killed by the RCMP, and residential schools, which disrupted inter-generational knowledge of hunting and living off the land. How do you see Feeding My Family as connected to other Indigenous movements? What role do non-Indigenous people have?

LEESEE: They are very much

What do you think needs to change for food to be a right and not a profit-making venture in the North?

LEESEE: I think not enough northerners or Inuit seem to understand it's a basic human right that we have in Canada. And the stores could definitely lower their food prices. There's no easy answer for how to do that. It could be lowering freight costs, more subsidies from different levels of government and even Inuit organizations, and people finding ways to be self-reliant.

ISRAEL: I understand that businesses have to make money as well but it is just way too much. They really are gouging. The annual income of North West Company's CEO is \$2 million. My annual income for 2014 is \$36,000 and I have five kids and a wife, and we have survived. The CEO lives in southern Canada where prices are cheap. I am sure he doesn't need all that money.

People are coming together to fight our government and voice our concerns. Government has always and will always want us to listen to their reasons, but it is now time for them to listen to us.

JANNIE: These community actions pressure governments to be accountable and transparent in how public funds are being used, to protect people's right to food, and to enforce food safety regulations. There have been discussions as well about the need for more hunter support programs and community freezers. Although most families need to buy food at the grocery stores now, a lot of people still hunt for sustenance, and food sharing networks are very strong. There are some amazing initiatives being started up by northerners like country food markets or programs bringing youth out on the land to hunt.

connected, very much so. As Aboriginals, we are treated as less by the federal government. But now Aboriginals are speaking out more. There is a lot more awareness about other Aboriginal groups across the country. The federal government had assimilated First Nations across the country, and it is a very similar situation in the North.

For non-Indigenous people, there is a big role, a huge role. Because they can write to their members of Parliament, they can spread awareness, they can send donations, sign petitions.

JANNIE: As someone who is not Indigenous, I think it's crucial for us to work in solidarity with actions that are being led by Inuit and other Indigenous peoples. This is not just an Inuit or northern issue; we all have a role in taking action against it.

Looking back since 2011 and 2012, what lessons can you draw from your experiences with Feeding My Family?

LEESEE: I've learned that if the government is willing to do something, they can do it, any kind of government. Look at the government of Nunavut, and how fast they got their Nunavut food coalition strategy coming out. I've also learned that there are people out there who are hungry every day. I knew that before, but really knowing how much hunger is out there is different. And I've learned that people care when someone's hungry. It's amazing how much people care.

The most important part is speaking when you believe in something, and sticking to it. And staying focused. With so many different issues we face in the North, so many other factors to consider, the big thing I've learned is staying focused. Also learning about yourself and taking risks, not knowing if it's going to work or not. Doing something you believe in can be risky. ★

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Regulatory Snarls for Small-scale Farmers

Consumers and foodies are clamouring for ethical local foods, but some farmers are in a pickle just trying to get their goods to market.

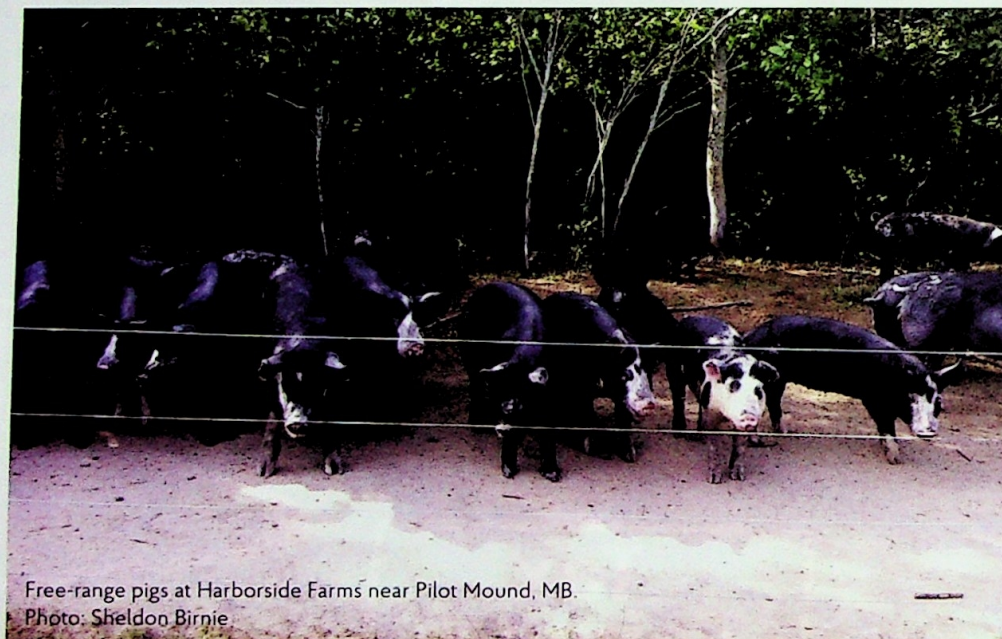
By SHELDON BIRNIE

In 2013, Clint and Pam Cavers of Harborside Farms won a Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (MAFRI) sponsored competition for "Manitoba food entrepreneurs who have developed but not fully commercialized an innovative new food product." Their winning creation: a prosciutto made from the pasture-fed pigs raised on their small family farm near Pilot Mound, MB. The gold medal came with a \$10,000 prize to further develop their product for commercialization. A number of chefs, along with other consumers in Winnipeg, were clamouring for local specialty meat products, and the Cavers felt they were onto something special.

Then, early one August morning just a few short months later, inspectors from MAFRI showed up on their doorstep with a seize-and-destroy order for the same specialty meats that had just been awarded top prize and praised by the minister of agriculture. According to the provincial health inspector, the meat had not been properly tested in accordance with industry standards, and was therefore "unfit for human consumption."

"We take a hell of a lot more care in what we do than someone who works an eight-hour shift at a plant who goes home and doesn't think about his job anymore," Clint Cavers told me at the time. "This isn't just a job for us. This is our life."

Over the past couple of years, small-scale farmers in Manitoba have been living in a regulatory twilight zone. MAFRI has been encouraging producers to develop specialty products to satisfy consumer



Free-range pigs at Harborside Farms near Pilot Mound, MB.
Photo: Sheldon Birnie

demand for locally made food. However, producers who've gone out on a limb to provide those products have found themselves shut down by a regulatory system that was developed by Manitoba Health for large industrial food processors.

A few months later, the Harvest Moon Society, which offers consumers in Winnipeg a direct market for produce and other food products through their monthly "buying club" deliveries, was abruptly told by the province they could no longer sell homemade preserves or uninspected eggs or chickens. Up until that point, those popular items were available as "farm gate" sales, as though consumers were buying the products from the farmers' homes. However, because the sales were going through the Harvest Moon Society's website, the province refused to recognize the direct nature of the sales,

even though individual products came from a specific farm and were labelled as such. Brad Anderson, a member of the Harvest Moon Society who farms near Cypress River, MB (and from whom my wife and I occasionally buy bacon and other products), says the experience was "real frustrating."

Just as small-scale farmers in Manitoba were starting to pull their hair out over the mixed messages from regulators, the province did an about-face and decided to listen to farmers and other stakeholders. The idea was to try to come up with some solutions, to establish some sort of clarity for producers who wanted to satisfy demands for local niche products without making the massive jump to a full-scale industrial operation. Over the second half of 2014, Dr. Wayne Lees, retired chief veterinary officer for Manitoba, headed a series of

roundtable discussions. Representatives for small-scale farmers, chefs, and farmers' market associations came together to identify areas of concern and come up with recommendations on how the industry in Manitoba can progress. The findings were published in the report *Advancing the small scale, local food sector in Manitoba: a path forward*.

"The whole thing went pretty good; everyone I talked to was pretty happy," says Anderson, who represented the Harvest Moon Society at the roundtable discussions. When I first spoke to Anderson midway through the process, he'd said that he and some small-scale farmers were "cautiously optimistic," while others remained suspicious. And while large industry groups like the Keystone Agricultural Producers also sat at the table with the farmers' market folks, apparently early suspicions from both sides were allayed enough that, according to Anderson, "Everyone who was there was able to live with the report."

The report tackles the problems faced by small-scale producers head on, offering recommendations to the province on regulatory issues, technical advice, business and financial tools, marketing and distribution, policy, advocacy, and governance.

"The next step is obviously the recommendations that have been brought forward," Ron Kostyshyn, Manitoba's minister of agriculture, says. "Staff have now started to dissect recommendations. Some, from my understanding, are fairly straightforward."

However, there is no firm timeline for implementation. As the report itself makes clear, there are often a number of provincial departments at play at certain steps in food production, and getting each department on board will be a challenge. Kostyshyn affirmed the provincial government's commitment to acting on the recommendations of the report, but with a provincial election on the horizon in 2016, if action isn't taken soon, there is no guarantee the report will result in any positive changes.

FROM COAST TO COAST

Unfortunately, the situation in Manitoba is not unique. Across Canada (and the U.S.), small-scale producers face unique challenges – and outright battles – to get their products to market.

Arzeena Hamir farms in the Comox Valley, near Courtenay, B.C. While her 10-hectare operation is "mostly hay," she and her husband also make a number of value-added products, like preserves. They find the regulations surrounding such goods confusing at best.

"The provincial health services authority swoops in and tells you you need to get your stuff tested," she says after her recent attempts to commercialize a garlic scape jam. "But they don't provide any information for me to make a proper judgment. How often do I have to test this? Where? How much does it cost?"

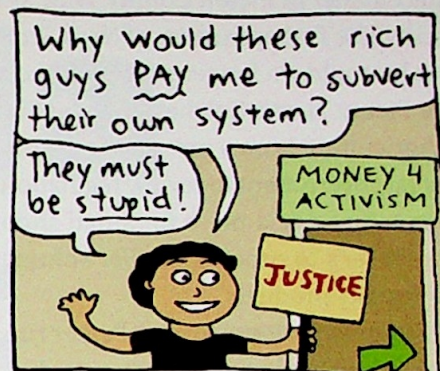
As in Manitoba, Hamir explains that B.C.'s quota system for poultry and eggs is also a point of frustration for small-scale producers. Supply management quotas are in place to help regulate the industries, but there is little to no room within the systems to accommodate specialty producers.

In B.C., farmers can raise up to 2,000 chickens without a quota, while in Manitoba, farmers like Anderson can currently only raise a "personal amount" of up to 999 chickens. "We're ready to go to 1,500 or 2,000. And if we ever wanted to land a restaurant or series of stores we'd need to raise 3,000 or 4,000," a frustrated Anderson explains.

Under current regulations, there is no room for anyone but the big processors at the table. If you're a farmer wanting to expand beyond the personal threshold of 999 chickens but aren't prepared to go fully commercial – which is a huge step, not to mention a massive financial investment – then you're out of luck. In Manitoba, the minimum commercial allotment would require the producer to raise 30,000 kg of birds (or, approximately 15,000 chickens) every eight weeks. "There should be a way to buy into a quota system for alternative production," Anderson believes.

The NGO* DREAM JOB

Stephanie McMillan



*
"Non-Governmental Organization"
(Non-profit, i.e. paid activism).

THOSE TURKEYS

Farmers in Nova Scotia have recently come up against a very similar roadblock. In the fall of 2014, Gordon Fraser, a long-time butcher in Pictou County, N.S., was told by The Turkey Farmers of Nova Scotia that he could no longer process turkeys. The Pictou North Colchester Federation of Agriculture is now pressuring the provincial government to review regulations so as to provide a place for small shops like Fraser's to process smaller volumes of specialty products.

Fraser isn't alone. Robert Parker runs a greenhouse operation just outside of Pictou, N.S., and is involved with the New Glasgow Farmers Market. Since Gordon Fraser's incident, Parker says that things have gotten worse for the small-scale producer.

"There seems to be an effort, particularly from the turkey market board, to control what the small farmer is doing," Parker says. "There seems to be a fear that the small farmers and backyard growers have maybe five per cent of the market. And now [the big producers] want that five per cent on top of their 95 per cent. They're big producers, and that's fine, but there should be room for the small growers, we feel."

"They've closed down all the local butchering operations under the pretense of food safety," Parker continued, echoing a refrain expressed by small-scale producers across the country.

When small-scale producers have been sanctioned or impeded in developing new products by provincial health departments, the issue of "food safety" is used to justify the actions of the regulators. However, you'd be hard-pressed to find a small-scale producer who doesn't value food safety as highly, or more highly than industrial producers. But as with the quota system, specific regulations for smaller processors and producers currently just don't exist.

Anderson, along with others involved in the roundtable planning sessions in Manitoba, is hopeful that the province will begin adopting "outcome-based

regulation" for operations that don't fit within the larger industry norm.

"With outcome-based, you just have to show that your process is safe," Anderson says, explaining that this could allow smaller abattoirs and other processing facilities to thrive.

Out in B.C., where the climate is more amenable to small-scale agricultural operations than Manitoba, there are still plenty of regulatory barriers. For example, Abra Brynne of Food Secure Canada describes an abattoir servicing a small community that needed to take "into account regulations involving municipal zoning, building codes, fire safety, worker safety, highway signage, effluent and waste disposal, packaging and labelling and food safety – there were over a dozen different government departments at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels that had an influence over the operation."

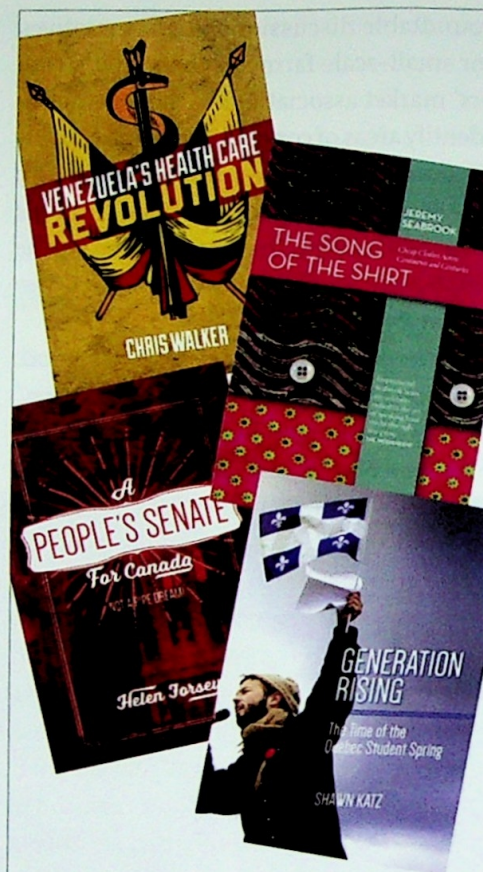
In Nova Scotia, small-scale producers are bracing for a fight. "So far we haven't made great strides," Parker says, "but we haven't closed the door. For small agriculture in Nova Scotia, it's really a death knell if we can't get anyone to listen. It's too important not to fight."

These niche markets that small-scale producers are looking to supply represent a small fraction of the agricultural sector. However, when rural communities are able to develop regionally specific alternative economies, it strengthens those communities in the face of the economic uncertainty that is inherent to farming.

By hog-tying these producers with regulations designed for industrial food production, our regulators are effectively holding whole communities back while limiting the access to high quality, local food for countless consumers. With interest in local food soaring, why not make hay while the sun shines? ★



SHELDON BIRNIE is a reporter for *The Herald*, a community weekly, and the editor of the quarterly *Manitoba Eco-Journal*. He lives in Winnipeg and plays country music on the weekends.



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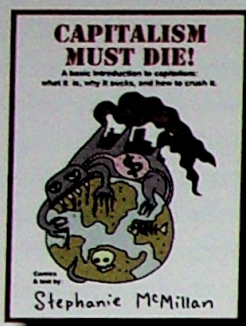
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Capitalism Sucks and Must Be Crushed



Capitalism Must Die!

A basic introduction to capitalism: what it is, why it sucks, and how to crush it.

By Stephanie McMillan

Idées Nouvelles Idées Prolétariennes

Reviewed by PAUL BUHLE

Some 20 years ago, while creating a book of Mike Alewitz's labour murals, the artist and I faced the inevitable question: what would a revolutionary artist *want* his book to be called? He insisted on a word that seemed to me long outdated, belonging to another, faraway world: agitprop. As in, the way that the Communist International of the 1920s, before (and, lamentably, also after) Stalin's seizure of power, described the agitation and propaganda value of art. It seemed to me, notwithstanding my own lifetime of left politics, so very unartistic. Alewitz was stubborn (and he won): the point of his art had been from the beginning to transform society by visually assaulting capitalism and capitalists, by telling the stories of the working class and the oppressed. Perhaps I should add that most of his revolutionary murals – from St. Paul, Minnesota, to New York, to Nicaragua, to the Connecticut community college where he has taught for decades – have been painted over. The people in power clearly don't like his artistic message.

Stephanie McMillan is an agitprop artist and no doubt proud of it. The granddaughter of a once-famed German animator, she studied at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts with the political descendants of blacklisted animators in the U.S., and then turned in the 1990s to cartooning. It was in her nature to begin self-syndicating, an ambitious

and (for most artists) frustrating – make that heartbreaking – effort to succeed on their own terms. Thanks to skill and temerity, she broke through to big as well as small publications, and, in 2012, won the Robert F. Kennedy award for editorial cartoonists. She also set herself on being a political organizer, from anti-poverty groups to Occupy and beyond. In a commercial publishing world with scarce room for left-wing artists, she has brought out two books from Seven Stories Press and other works that could be considered semi-commercial (as in, distributed by herself and her supporters without much commercial publicity or attention). "Undaunted" is her middle name, or should be.

The actual art in *Capitalism Must Die!* can only be described as utilitarian, serving the purpose of illustrating the ideas in her prose. The prose is straightforward and reminds me of the "basics" in the socialist study classes of my youth (during the early 1960s). We did not get into ecology back then, but the historic rise of capitalism, grinding the faces of the poor, the spread of the system across the planet (true to Marx's own formula) to newly available resources and oppressed populations – all of this seems familiar. What is new here, in a society of declining literacy, is her skill in mixing images and interpretive paragraphs. Any young person who hates their job, or can't find one, can understand intuitively her

description of exploitation as the source of profits. McMillan excels in using this seemingly obvious point to explain how the system at large is fast murdering the planet.


She writes and draws as a socialist revolutionary who knows that working-class folks will not automatically be won over to understanding that something drastic both needs to be done and *can* be done. If there is a rub, it is in her appeal for a renewed Marxism-Leninism dependent on a vanguard party ("The trouble with Leninism," an old anarchist postcard of the 1960s read, "is that everyone wants to be Lenin."). On the positive side, she has plenty of useful suggestions – including points that many of us have tried to live by – on being democratic, patient (even in disagreements with other radicals), and determined to carry through for the long haul.

No one should expect an artist to have all the political answers. Stephanie McMillan prompts the questions and helps her readers along, and that is a lot. Read this book and pass it along to a young person, too. ★



PAUL BUHLE co-founded the New Left journal *Radical America* in 1967 at age 22 and has edited a dozen non-fiction comics and books including

Insurgent Images: The Agitprop Murals of Mike Alewitz.



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SUSTAINER PROFILE

JENN BERGEN



Jenn is from Treaty Four territory in Saskatchewan, where she spent the last 10 years learning and doing coordination work around social justice issues. She is currently pursuing a PhD at the University of Ottawa, where her research interests include feminist and anti-racist participatory action research and youth civic engagement. She is a moderately committed runner, a terrible knitter, an occasional musician and art maker, and a part-time gardener.

What was the best thing about growing up in Watrous?

Watrous is where I learned what community organizing was, before I knew it was called that. The people there know that if they want to see change, they have to roll up their sleeves and convince their neighbours to do the same. Growing up in a small town on the Prairies also instilled in me a love for hot summers, bike rides, and the sound of passing trains.

What's your greatest extravagance?

Copious amounts of popcorn.

What do the next five years hold for you?

I definitely want to have/be best friends with a chocolate lab (like the dog, not the place where chocolate and science happens).

Why do you read and support *Briarpatch*?

I read *Briarpatch* because it has always been created by inspiring people from my community whom I truly love. That, and to continue educating myself, bit by bit, about the ways that the world can be better; every issue I learn something new, am pushed a little bit further left, and am inspired by the stories and analysis within.

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Kill, Clean, Eat, and Repeat

In praise of hunting.

I came to the realization the other day that one of the most effective ways I can contribute to community food security is by becoming a gun-toting prepper. This happened, for some reason, while I was watching the latest movie in the *Hunger Games* saga, but the point is that even if the proverbial shit never does hit the fan, it's important to be able to secure our own shared food sources.

So, by "gun-toting prepper," what I really mean is learning to hunt. Animals, that is. Not people. Let me also be clear that I believe that at best, preppers are melodramatic, and at worst, they incite fear and hysteria. However, there is reason to believe that we cannot indefinitely enjoy the industrial standard of living that we experience today. Earth's resources are not unlimited, but we treat them like they are. And in the future, the option of popping by a store or restaurant to pick up supper may not be as affordable and convenient as it is today.

While you probably know that localizing your food supply is a good idea and that eating wild meat is healthier and more environmentally friendly than eating conventionally farmed meats, you may not realize that eating local wild meat can be more sustainable than eating a strictly vegetarian or vegan diet. This fact was emphasized for me recently when reading about how the demand for quinoa has led to its conversion from a local staple in Peru and Bolivia to an export monocrop that diminishes food security for local people. Similarly, year-round demand for the export of asparagus has dangerously depleted water resources in the Peruvian asparagus region, while land clearing for soybean production and cattle ranching are leading causes of deforestation in South America.

As I watched the drama unfold in *The Hunger Games*, I thought about the benefits of hunting your own meat (or securing it from a local hunter). An article in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* defines community food security as "a situation in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice." Wild meat often fulfills all these criteria. First, you know where your food comes from and can get it yourself without relying on the global distribution network. Second, you either learn new skills in hunting and butchering your own food, or you support your local economy and a community member's skills if your local wild meat comes from someone else. Third, you are less likely to be contributing to the gentrification of the food system. Fourth, wild meat is

leaner and thus healthier. And fifth, hunting sidesteps all the ethical pitfalls of buying factory-farmed meat.

To date, my experience with hunting has all been while I was living in Labrador. It's still common in Labrador for people to source their own food through hunting, gathering, and fishing. The community I lived in was very welcoming and I was quickly invited over to eat wild meat. And soon after I arrived, I received a further invitation to help clean and process a variety of hunted animals, including partridge, geese, caribou, seal, and porcupine – and I learned valuable skills in doing so. I was also lucky enough to be invited to participate in a seal hunt. It wasn't the type of seal hunt that you've maybe seen in PETA videos. Everyone I knew in Labrador only hunted adult seals for personal consumption (not commercial sales) and many people used as much of the animal as possible to make items such as sealskin boots.

The whole process seemed a hell of a lot more sustainable than buying meat or vegetables at the grocery store that are shipped in from who-knows-where and fed or sprayed with who-knows-what. And in Labrador and other remote areas, hunting can be more economically viable than paying the inflated prices for inferior supermarket food. Even if you don't hunt yourself, it is almost certain that you know people who do. Perhaps one of the most overlooked aspects of hunting is how common sharing and bartering are in communities where people hunt. It is not unusual for people's freezers to be full of meat from others.

So, take this as a call to source and eat local wild meat in reasonable (not Texas-sized) quantities and portions. Then, pat yourself on the back as you tackle multiple issues at once: preparing for the Apocalypse, making choices that benefit your local economy and your health, and learning new land-based skills that ground your environmental ideals. Finally, a dietary plan that is healthy for people, positive for the planet, and tastes good, too. ★



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